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Reaches and kills Pityrosporum ovale, which causes dandruff . . . scalp becomes cleaner, fresher, healthier

Don't go around with a case of dandruff that humiliates you and disgusts others. Start using Listerine Antiseptic and massage once a day at least. Twice a day is better.

This amazingly delightful treatment has proved successful in laboratory and clinic. Countless men and women use no other.

Listerine Antiseptic, famous for 25 years as a mouth wash and gargle, succeeds so brilliantly in controlling dandruff because it gives scalp, hair, and hair follicles an antiseptic bath which removes ugly flakes and kills the queer, bottle-shaped germ (Pityrosporum ovale) which causes dandruff.

Start with Listerine Antiseptic and continue the treatments regularly. Results will delight and amaze you. No other remedy that we know of has such a clinical record of success in such a large majority of cases.

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THE TREATMENT

MEN: Douse Listerine Antiseptic on the scalp *at least once a day.* **WOMEN:** Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic right along the part with a medicine dropper, to avoid wetting the hair excessively.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage with fingers or a good hair brush. But don't expect overnight results, because *germ conditions* cannot be cleared up that fast.

Genuine Listerine Antiseptic is guaranteed not to bleach the hair or affect texture.

LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC **THE *PROVED* TREATMENT FOR DANDRUFF**

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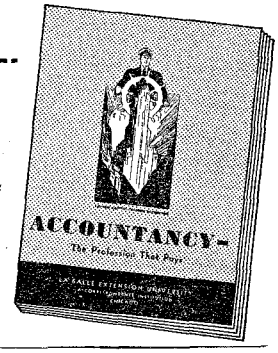

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ARGOSY

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Volume 292 CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 5, 1939 Number 3

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Down the endless corridor of eternity she came, so beautiful that one man alone could see her ageless evil. Beginning a magnificent new fantastic novel

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Bend close to this barren ground; you will hear the heart-beat of China—never to die

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Cover by Rudolph Belarski
Illustrating One Step from Hell

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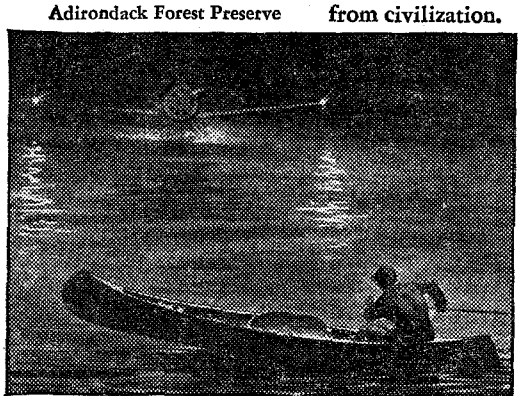
"THE HURTLING MONSTER ROARED STRAIGHT AT ME!"

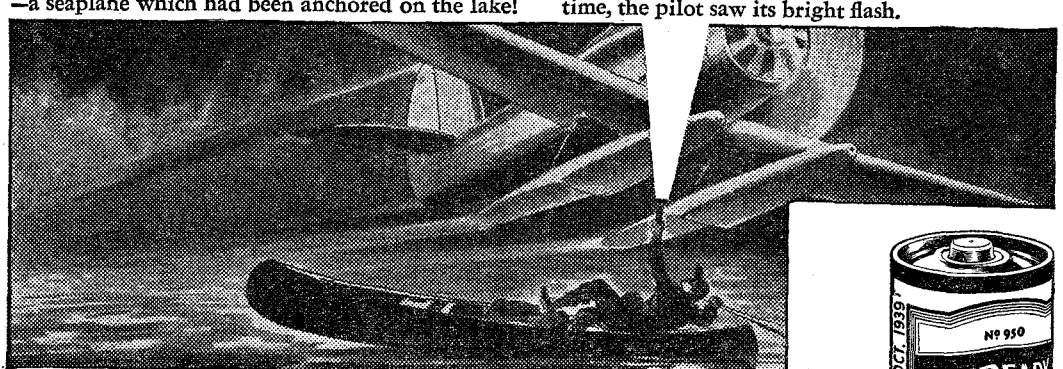
F. L. BROWNELL
Licensed Guide
Adirondack Forest Preserve

1 **"One dark night,"** writes Mr. Brownell, "I had to cross Fourth Lake in a canoe. The utter silence gave one the feeling of being a million miles from civilization.



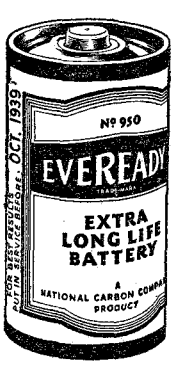
2 **"About halfway across,** the night was shattered by the roar of a powerful motor. Two specks of light, which rapidly grew larger, came towards me —a seaplane which had been anchored on the lake!

3 **"The hurtling monster** was roaring straight for me! The pilot couldn't hear my shouts. I made a frantic grab for the flashlight beside me. Just in time, the pilot saw its bright flash.



4 **"The plane shot aside** as it took the air, missing my canoe by what seemed like inches! I think I can truthfully say that those 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries saved my life. I'll tell the world I'll never be without them in *my* flashlight. It just doesn't pay to take chances.

(*Signed*) *A. L. Brownell*"



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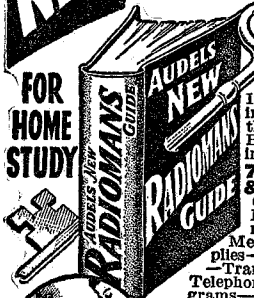

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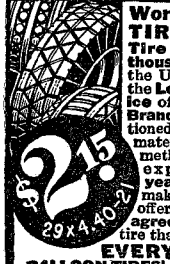

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29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
6.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-19	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
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30x5	3.65	1.65
33x5	3.75	1.75
35x5	3.95	1.75

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38x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x8	13.25	4.95

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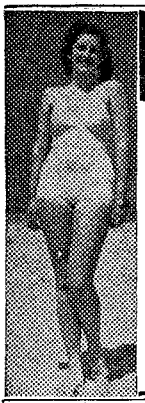

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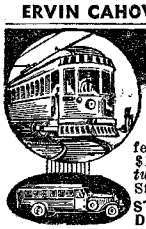

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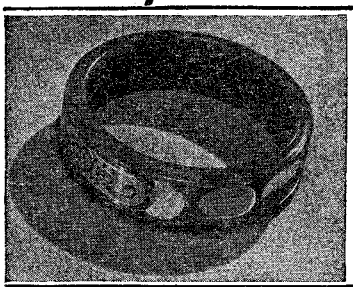

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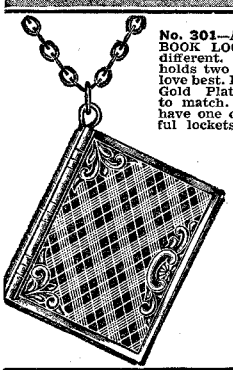

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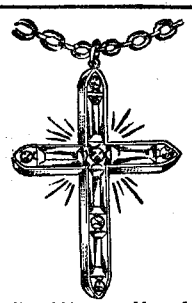

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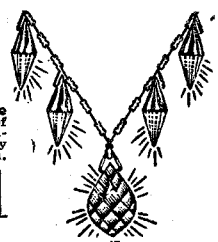

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We daily grow in people's estimations . . .

"Swarming crowds at stations meet us,
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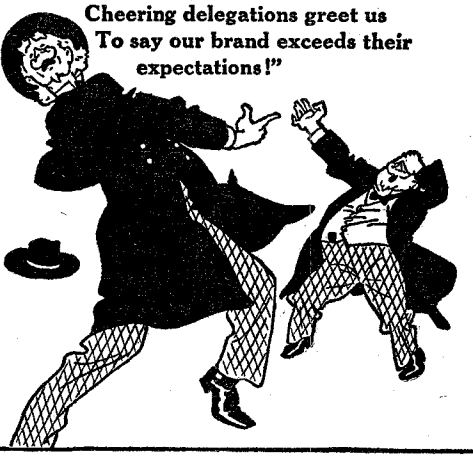

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The Ninth Life

Her beauty was ageless—her power, invincible. For her feet paced the dusty ways of eternity, and by her side stalked the sacred Cats of Sekhmet. Yet there was one young Englishman who guessed her dread secret, and him she must destroy. . . . Beginning the story of a fantastic struggle between the Darkness and the Light—the finest novel of its kind since Rider Haggard's "She"

By JACK MANN

CHAPTER I

THE SMILE OF ETERNITY

ALTHOUGH more than two years had passed since Gregory George Gordon Green—known as "Gees" for obvious reasons—had established his confidential agency, he still gave himself an occasional mental pat on the back over his choice of a secretary. She was not only useful, but decorative too, a tall girl with blue eyes and brown hair with reddish lights in it, and a face attractive more through its expressiveness of eyes and lips than through regularity of feature.

She faced him, this mid-morning of January, from the doorway of his office, and dropped her bomb calmly enough. "Inspector Tott would like to see you, Mr. Green."

He took his well-shaped but unduly large hands from his pockets, and stared at her incredulously. "Tott?" he echoed. "All right, Miss Brandon," he said at last. "I'll see him."

Presently she ushered in a well-set-up, alert-looking man who might have been a stockbroker or a shopkeeper—but who actually was a trusted officer of the Special Branch of the C.I.D. For a few seconds the two men gazed at each other in silence. At the conclusion of Gees' last case, they had agreed to bury a certain hatchet, but their expressions indicated that part of the handle still stuck out.

"Come in, Inspector."

"Before I do, Mister Green"—the inspector laid a heavy emphasis on the *Mister*—"I'd like to be sure that microphone of yours is not working. Because I'm speaking unofficially."

"Whatever you say, Inspector," Gees assured him blandly, "will not be used as evidence against you."

"I wish we had you back in uniform again," Tott observed, rather wistfully.

Gees shook his head. "My fee for an initial consultation is two guineas. I wouldn't get that in uniform."

"I know what you'd get from me," Tott replied grimly.

"We both know," Gees assured him.

For a few seconds the inspector simply glared. "You remember that Kestwell case?" he asked eventually.

Gees nodded. "You wanted to arrest *me*."

"Yes—that's the point," Tott said. "You got Mr. Briggs to come along and prevent that arrest." Tott paused. "I believe they think a lot of Mr. Briggs at the Foreign Office." Again Tott paused. Finally, as if the words were torn from him, he blurted: "I suppose you've heard that Mr. Briggs has got engaged to be married?"

"I have, now. From you. Who is the lady? I must ring up Tony and congratulate him."

"It's because he's not to be congratulated that I'm sitting here," Tott said slowly. "You've heard of Lady Benderneck, I expect?"

"There is also a Buckingham Palace," Gees observed pensively.

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"Yes, I thought you had. Well, she sponsored this Miss Kefra—Cleo Kefra. Mr. Briggs met her and—well, lost his head over her. And the engagement was announced day before yesterday."

"The old hag would sponsor anything, at a price," Gees remarked. "Cleo Kefra. Sounds a bit exotic."

"Is, I assure you," Tott said, and made it a grim comment. "Well, I've got a great respect for Mr. Briggs, and I've seen the lady," Tott told him. "I'd hate to see a gentleman like him trapped."

"What is wrong with Miss Kefra?" Gees asked.

Tott shook his head. "You'd better see her for yourself," he answered. "Mr. Briggs is a friend of yours, I know. There's nothing wrong with her—nothing that I can put a finger on, but—"

"Inspector, Briggs is pretty level-headed, and I don't see any possibility of interfering, even if I felt like it."

"Well, I've got it off my chest," Tott said, and stood up.

GEES delayed him with a gesture. "Who is Cleo Kefra? The name isn't English, for a start."

"She looks Eastern to me," Tott said. "She's got a passport issued by the British consulate in Alexandria describing her as a British subject aged twenty-three, and apparently she's very wealthy. No relatives, as far as I can gather. Came to this country five months ago, and she's leased Barnby-under-Hedlington Grange, furnished—that's in the Cotswolds. Also runs a swagger flat in Gravenor Mansions."

"It sounds as if Mr. Briggs is to be congratulated," Gees remarked.

"The flat is number thirteen," Tott added.

"My grandmother died of pneumonia," Gees said.

"What's that got to do with it?" Tott almost barked.

"As much as the number of the flat, I think," Gees told him. "Don't get peeved. I appreciate your interest, and I shall certainly make a point of seeing the lady as soon as I can. But what *is* your grievance against Miss Kefra?"

Tott shook his head. "I can't pin it down," he answered. He turned toward the door. "Thank you for listening to me," he added. "It's not—as I said—a matter over which I can do anything."

"Thank you for talking," Gees said. "I'm glad you feel like that about Mr. Briggs, Inspector, though I don't see—"

"No," Tott remarked in the pause. "But I must get along."

After closing the outer door, Gees went into his secretary's room, seated himself on the end of her desk, and produced the inevitable cigarette case. He said, "If Tott were a fool he wouldn't be where he is." The girl waited.

"And yet," he went on, "it's apparently possible for Tott, even, to acquire a wacky notion. About Briggs. Foreign Office. He's just got engaged. The girl, it seems, exotic, slinky, and hails from Egypt. Also appears possessed of a healthy wad of dough. And Tott wants me to break the engagement since he can't do anything about it himself."

"But that's absurd," she said.

"Quite. Now I suggest standing we lunch at the Berkeley, Miss Brandon. I'll fix it for Tony to bring Cleo Kefra along. A woman's view of another woman is always worth having."

"So is a lunch at the Berkeley," she remarked. "But what name was that you called her?"

"Exactly, Miss Brandon—it hit me just like that. Cleo Kefra—something to do with the great pyramid, by the sound of it. Not an alias, either—she'd have chosen something less conspicuous."

Tony Briggs, over the phone, said he'd be delighted to bring his *fiancée* to lunch on Wednesday. No, he had not seen Tott recently—not for over a fortnight, in fact.

"And when is the wedding?" Gees inquired.

"Oh, we haven't got as far as that yet," Tony protested.

"Just as well. I'd better pass judgment first."

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"Oho!" And Tony laughed. "I've no fear of anybody's judgment."

"Probably another Tony said that about another Cleopatra, old son," Gees observed.

He hung up, and went along to Miss Brandon's room again. She looked up from her typing at him. "It just occurred to me that history is doing another of its repetitions," he said.

"History—?"

"Anthony Briggs—and apparently Cleopatra Kefra," he explained.

"I thought of that some time ago," she said.

"Well, the other one threw the world away, but I expect chucking the Foreign Office will be this one's limit."

"SACRED mackerel!" Gees ejaculated, as he entered the Berkeley lounge on Wednesday with Miss Brandon. "The old man's getting gay."

The white-haired, soldierly-looking man, seated with another of his kind over two dry sherries, got on his feet and came toward them. There was enough facial likeness to declare the relationship between him and Gees—though his father was better looking and had neatly proportioned hands and feet, while Gees had large hands and very large feet.

"How d'you do, Miss Brandon?" he said courteously. "How are you, Gordon? Lunching here?"

"Meeting Tony Briggs and the girl he's going to marry, Father," Gees explained. "You know Tony, of course. Would you and—and that friend of yours care to join our party?"

General Sir George Green shook his head. "Thank you, Gordon, but—"

He broke off to stare toward the entrance, where Briggs and a tall, very slim girl were poised. "Gordon," he said, hurriedly, "I met that girl, exactly as she is now, when I was on my honeymoon in Egypt. A Miss Kefra."

"Mother to this one—no, though—it's the same name," Gees said. "An aunt—father's sister, probably. You'll be introduced?"

"Not now. No, I must get back to Farebrother."

With a slight bow he turned away—turned his back almost pointedly on Tony Briggs and his companion. Past question the girl's appearance had disconcerted him.

She was wearing a coat of undyed black panther fur, the five-group markings showing distinctly in its satiny gloss, and under it a closely fitted frock of shining gray, with a moonstone set in platinum pinned at her breast. Except for her fiancé's ring, she wore no other jewelry. A little black hat fitted closely to the red-brown of her hair, and under it her unusually pale face was perfect in feature.

Her eyes were amber flecked with green, and the pupils appeared almost abnormally small—yet they were very lovely eyes. She was bizarre, un-English—and queenly. Tott had said that her passport declared her as twenty-three, but in poise and dignity she appeared far beyond that age.

Unusually slender, she was sinuous, too; she flexed in movement to an unusual degree. His first thought as she neared them was that Tony had won a first prize out of life; his second that, before she spoke a word, he disliked the girl—or woman. Beside him Miss Brandon made an utter contrast, as of normality facing the almost-impossible; he felt that he had never liked Miss Brandon quite so well, or trusted her so fully, as in this moment—and the green-flecked, amber eyes read all his thoughts and feelings, he realized, while their pupils dilated suddenly, rendering them darkly lustrous as she gazed at him.

"We're a trifle late, I'm afraid," Tony Briggs began. "Cleo, my two very good friends, Miss Brandon and Mr. Green—"

The strange girl's hand, Gees realized as he held it for a moment, was very cold. She smiled at him, confidently—as might a duellist coming on guard. "I have been looking forward to meeting you, Mr. Green."

Perfect English, with no trace of accent. And a perfect voice, low-pitched, soft, and yet resonant. Her smile was the smile of—Gees faltered—of eternity.

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CHAPTER II

THE LADY OF THE LION

AT THE corner table, Gees faced Tony Briggs with Cleo Kefra on his right, and Miss Brandon facing her. Some dozen tables away, he could see his father and Colonel Farebrother, and noticed that the general kept staring at them, uneasily.

Cleo Kefra talked well, with the assurance of a woman of the world; Tony Briggs' gaze at her proved him hopelessly, fatuously in love—Gees felt rather grimly that he had never seen a worse case. Miss Brandon appeared divided between nervousness and amusement.

A mention of Egypt, toward the end of the meal, evoked from Gees the remark that he had never been there, and Cleo's dark eyebrows lifted in slight surprise.

"I gathered from Tony that you had been everywhere," she said.

"I was going to Egypt the year I joined the police force," he answered. "As it is, I haven't been there in this incarnation."

"Then you believe we live more than once?" she asked.

"An open mind," he answered, "is always useful."

"What do you do—your work, I mean," she asked. "Tony said something about an agency, but he was terribly vague over it."

"I've got a four-roomed flat within shouting distance of the Haymarket, and half of it is my office. I started by advertising that I'd tackle anything from mumps to murder."

"And how many cases of mumps have you attended?" she asked.

"I've had one murder—two murders, in fact," he said. "The others—the ones worth considering, that is—have been worse."

"Do go on," she begged. She spoke lightly enough, but Gees heard a challenge in her tone.

"Well," he said slowly, "there was a man who made shadows."

Her fine brows drew down. Then she smiled and nodded. Every movement, every gesture, was graceful.

"I know," she said. "I saw it once at a party, a man who made shadows of ducks and giraffes and all sorts of things with his hands."

"Not that, Miss Kefra," he said. "I mean that old shadow magic—older than Egypt, even. Each shadow a life."

"I—" she began, and stopped. Again he saw the pupils of her eyes dilate, and knew he had, as he had intended, roused fear in her. "You—what did you do?" she asked, after a pause in which the other two, silent and listening, sensed the tension.

"That man will make no more shadows," he said, rather grimly.

"How very thrilling!" She had recovered her composure, and even managed a laugh. Tony Briggs drew an audible breath of relief, and scowled fiercely at Gees, but said nothing.

"Mr. Green is very mysterious about that case," Miss Brandon observed. "It's the only one of which I don't know the end."

"How do you mean a man made shadows, Gees?" Tony fired out with abrupt harshness. "And each one a life?"

"He took lives to prolong his own," Gees said seriously. "It was old magic, the sort of thing nobody believes nowadays. No more credible than—well, someone told me today that he saw Miss Kefra, exactly as she is now, thirty-five—no, thirty-eight years ago."

"Which is quite possible," Cleo said calmly.

"Quite—darling, what *do* you mean?" Tony demanded.

"Merely time-traveling," she explained. "The man's sight might have gone forward thirty-eight years, just as memory can go back to childhood—or even beyond, in some cases."

"This is much too deep for me," Tony remarked glumly. "I'd say the man saw somebody like you, except that there's nobody like you."

"Who is the man, Mr. Green?" Cleo asked abruptly.

"It happens to be my father," Gees answered. "Thirty-eight years ago he was on

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his honeymoon in Egypt—so he tells me—and saw you just as you are now—with the same name, Miss Kefra. I told him an aunt, probably. It's a more likely explanation. People don't go time-traveling on their honeymoons. At least, I wouldn't."

She smiled once more, her perfect lips triangular.

"It appears that you and I are interested in the same subjects," he remarked. "Will you get Tony to bring you round to my place for tea some time?"

"Willingly," she assented. "I should very much like to hear more about this shadow magic you mentioned."

"The man who practiced it," he said, slowly and looking full into her strange lovely eyes, "was very old. There were many shadows."

"I don't understand." But Gees knew beyond any doubt that she did understand.

"I'm sorry to seem like breaking up the party," Tony cut in abruptly, "but being a wage-slave under Government, I ought to get back in time for tea. And if I'm to take you along first, Cleo—"

With Tony holding the door of a taxi outside, a little later, the girl gave Gees her hand and gazed full at him.

"I'm so glad we have met," she said. "Tony must bring you to see me, next time. For tea, one of his free afternoons."

"It will be a great pleasure," he assured her.

With Miss Brandon beside him, he watched the taxi go, and saw how its two occupants sat well apart from each other in their corners.

"We'll walk back, I think, Miss Brandon," he said.

"Just as you wish," she assented. "It's a beautiful afternoon."

"On second thoughts"—he lifted a crooked finger at a taxi-driver—"you take this and charge it to petty cash, while I run along to the British Museum for an hour or two."

She gave him an inquiring look as the taxi drew beside them.

"Never mind. I'm probably crazy. Both of us—Tott and I . . ."

THE winter dusk was well advanced when, returning to his flat in Little Oakfield Street, Gees let himself in and entered Miss Brandon's office. She looked up. "You have been a long time," she said. "I have been thinking, since coming back here, Mr. Green. In over two years here, I have done about two months' real work," she explained. "You don't really need me—a girl in from an agency occasionally could take your dictation and—"

"You mean you want to give notice?" he interrupted incredulously.

"I might even go as far as that," she admitted, smiling.

He reached out to flick ash into the tray beside her typewriter. "Finding it monotonous?" he suggested.

"Not that. But my being here like this, filling in time by reading novels, is not fair to you. This—your agency—is a one-brain enterprise."

"What about that lunch today?" he demanded abruptly.

"Well, what about it?" she echoed.

"I arranged it," he said solwly, "because of Tott's visit here—because of Tott's notion. And I had an idea, while I was groveling in the dust of the British Museum, that it might have struck you too. Instead, you brood over this preposterous idea of yours—it *is* preposterous, my girl! I've got used to your being here, a wall to throw my thoughts against and watch 'em bounce, and I'd hate to lose you."

"For one thing, Mr. Green," she retorted rather acidly, "I am not your girl. For another, the wall feels itself as the end of a cul-de-sac. The hours I waste here—waste!"

"Then to you," he asked, "that lunch was a mere social function?"

"Hardly," and she shrugged slightly. "It was most uncomfortable."

"Oh! Now we're getting somewhere! Carry on, Miss Brandon."

"That—that Miss Kefra was afraid of you."

"I meant her to be, on sight. What about Tony?"

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"He won't be your friend much longer, if she has her way over it."

"No? Well, do you think I could get any girl from an agency that I could take to the Berkeley on a footing of equality, and count on the sense you showed with those two remarks? Moreover, I've been doing some thinking too. I'm going to make a case of this Miss Kefra, turn myself into a purely honorary and unsolicited nuisance as far as Tony Briggs is concerned—for his good, of course—and to drag you in and give you all the work you want."

"I don't understand, Mr. Green," she said, after a pause.

"No. I've got to explain. You know, of course, that I've dabbled a little in the occult."

"Then you consider Mr. Briggs—or Miss Kefra—an occult problem."

"When did it strike you that she was afraid of me?" he countered.

"When you talked about the shadow-maker," she answered, after a brief pause.

"Exactly. Miss Brandon, Cleo Kefra is *lamia* of some sort—uncanny, in some way," he said. "Tony Briggs is my friend, and I'd go a long way to keep him out of trouble. And that girl—woman, rather—spells trouble for him."

"She is—unusual," she conceded thoughtfully, "but what have you against her? What is there to justify interference?"

He stubbed out his cigarette, and lit another.

"I don't know. She hails from Egypt. She's paid old lady Benderneck to get her an entry into the circles Tony frequents, but she's—she's no background, really. At the best, an adventuress, and at the worst—but I want more than the mere impression I got at lunch before saying anything about that. Did you like her?"

She smiled. "We detested each other on sight," she answered.

"There you are! Intuition—on both sides."

"I don't understand any of it, yet," she said, "except that you seem determined to do exactly what you tell me Inspector Tott asked, merely because Mr. Briggs has—well, because he's in love with her rather than loves her. You see, I must discount my own dislike of her."

"Trying to be fair—yes, but—"

The telephone interrupted him. It was his father's voice he heard.

"Oh, it is you, Gordon? Can you dine with me tonight?"

"With all the pleasure in life, Father."

"Good. I'll expect you at seven-thirty."

"Thank you very much, Father. I'll be there."

He replaced the receiver, and nodded thoughtfully.

"May get a line on the lady," he said. "That was my father, asking me to dinner."

"And you think—yes—over his having met a relative of hers."

"I'm not so sure about that," he dissented slowly. "In fact, I'm not sure about anything. But I want you to do some scouting for me, round Gravenor Mansions. A little work for a change."

"Not to interview Miss Kefra?" she asked quickly, doubtfully.

"Far from it. No. Just nosing about. Maybe there's a caretaker with a thirsty wife, or a man on the lift who'd take you to the pictures in his off time—anything, as long as you find somebody with a waggly tongue. And then—anything at all about Miss Kefra. People who come to see her, the establishment she keeps, how she impresses the underlings—but don't run the risk of meeting her. She's seen you once—had you sitting facing her, and those eyes of hers would look through anyone."

"When do you want me to go?" she asked.

"Well, unless you're doing anything this evening—"

"I hope to have something to report tomorrow morning," she said.

"And don't talk any more about giving notice," he said emphatically. "I'd never get another secretary to fit to my ways as you do."

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"My dear"—she whispered it to the closed door after he had gone out—"I wonder which is the greater, my folly or your blindness."

"WELL, Father, it's good to see you again, and it must be quite a while since I had the honor of putting my feet in the family trough."

The general frowned, heavily. "I detest this modern slang, Gordon, as I think you know," he said.

"I'm sorry, Father," Gees apologized, with—for him—unusual meekness.

The old man stared uncomfortably at his plate, puffed out his cheeks, raised his eyes to his son's face. "Gordon," he began abruptly, "I wanted a word with you about that luncheon party of yours today. Perhaps you may be able to tell me something about that—er, that remarkable resemblance I noticed. About the lady with Mr. Briggs, I mean." He cleared his throat loudly, and Gees held grimly on to his own patience. "I have the highest regard for Anthony Briggs, as I think you know," the old man went on.

"You have given me that impression," Gees admitted.

"Yes. Yes. And—er, on thinking the matter over, after ringing you this afternoon—but was today your first meeting with the lady?"

"My first sight of her. Yes."

"Ah! Then probably, as far as she herself is concerned, you know little more than I do. As I was saying, on thinking it over, I decided to tell you the story of my meeting with the one who resembled her so very strongly. Not that there is anything to be done, as far as I can see, but knowing Anthony Briggs as you do, you might show by your attitude—"

"Yes. But show what, Father?" Gees inquired, after waiting vainly for the end of the sentence. He had never seen his father less at ease over anything than over this thirty-eight-year-old meeting with somebody who, then, had resembled Cleo Kefra and bore the same name.

"Disapproval of the entanglement," the general said with asperity.

"And make him more set on it than ever," Gees pointed out.

"I am not thinking only of Anthony Briggs," the general said. "I have in mind his—er, his position, and his access to things not in the knowledge of the public. I may be entirely wrong in anticipating—I may be doing him a grave injustice in suggesting that he is capable, under any circumstances, of—er—"

"Spilling the beans," Gees suggested, after waiting in vain.

"Confound those slang phrases!" the general snorted. "I was going to say, of disclosing confidential matters even to those whom he felt he could trust implicitly."

Which amounted, Gees thought but did not say, to exactly the same thing. He waited for his father to go on.

"But, as I said," the general continued, "I decided to tell you my story, which concerns, beyond any question in my mind, a member of this lady's family. You will then do what you choose—probably nothing, I gather."

He was getting ponderouser and ponderouser, Gees reflected, and made no comment. All the signs pointed to embarrassment over the story he had determined to tell.

"I think I told you I—er, I was on my honeymoon when the incident occurred," the general said. "I had got my captaincy over a year before, and had been seconded for Intelligence, which, let me tell you, was not then what it is now."

"I can well believe it," Gees remarked gravely.

THE general gave him a long look, but decided not to pursue that angle of the subject. "It was a starved service," he said. "The South African war was in being, and Omdurman was still a remembered campaign. Egypt, then, was what today would be called a propaganda center, Cairo especially, and you may or may not know that an intelligence officer

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is never off duty, even for one hour in a year."

"Then why take a honeymoon in Egypt?" Gees murmured.

"Why? My dear boy, my marriage formed an ostensible reason for going there, rendered the real reason inconspicuous. Your mother knew what she was doing—it was that or wait another year or more for marriage, and neither of us wished to wait. Neither of us regretted it, either. My work—even now I do not intend to define it—left us the greater part of our time, and—well, I need say no more on that head.

"We had been there six weeks and then your mother developed some gastric trouble which I understand is rather common there in the spring months."

"I've heard of it. Commonly known as 'Egyptian tummy,'" Gees said.

"Vulgarly known, you mean," the general reproved him. "Your mother became so ill as to need a nurse, though the doctor assured me there was no real danger. She ran high temperatures, and needed careful attention, that was all.

"One night the nurse assured me I was better out of the way, as my wife was sleeping and ought not to be disturbed, and I went for a walk in the Kasr-el-Nil direction and met—well, even at this length of time I will withhold his name.

"Another Intelligence man, say, who was very glad to see me, since my connection with that service was far less suspected than his own—not suspected at all, in fact.

"It was then between ten and eleven o'clock, and we agreed that I should go out to Mena House, which is almost under the Pyramids. To find and bring in a—well, I will say a dangerous person. An *agent provocateur*, whose capture would eliminate a very great part of our troubles. I was to make contact with a woman who had been put on his track, and arrest him."

"So you had women in Intelligence, then?" Gees asked.

"I cannot tell you what or whom we had," his father retorted stiffly. "Only that this woman, whom I had never seen before, would be at Mena House, dressed in a certain way, and I was to assure myself of her identity by a series of pass words.

"I got to the gardens of Mena House and found her, as I thought, alone at one of the tables. I joined her with an apology—which was a part of the passwords. In all, I remember, we had six sentences each to say and she made no mistake whatever in her replies. I was fully satisfied."

He sat silent for so long, then, that Gees ventured a: "Well?"

"SHE said we must wait, and we did," the general resumed. "It was very late, then. I—I had all the confidence in myself that one loses with experience, and—this part I doubt if you can understand—I found that woman very attractive. She seemed so utterly sincere, and dependent on me for the ultimate outcome of the night's work—"

"And she was the living image of Cleo Kefra," Gees said in the pause.

"What made you suspect that?" his father demanded.

He shrugged. "I don't know. But she was, eh?"

"She even gave me that name—Kefra, not the other. Colonel—the man who had sent me there had not told me her name, I realized later. In that service, we used not to deal very largely in names among ourselves. Perhaps she and I sat there an hour, talking on various subjects, and then one of the waiters came and spoke to her, in Arabic. Then she told me it was time to go, to make the capture, and we went to my *gharri*.

"She showed me a small revolver she carried in her bag, and insisted on coming with me, for my safety, she said.

"And that is very nearly all I can tell you, except that I was taken to Shephard's two days later, in a complete amnesia, and the woman I should have met was found dead on the bank of the Nile with her throat torn to pieces as if a tiger had mangled it. Oh, and the *agent provoca-*

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teur we should have captured made a clear escape."

"Drugged," Gees observed thoughtfully. "And that is all?"

"Nearly. For the period of amnesia, I shall never be sure whether dreams came back to my mind, or whether—but they must have been dreams.

"One I'm certain was a dream—a woman with the head of a lioness, purring like a cat. Another of the woman who told me her name was Kefra, with her arms round me, holding me back from something—or holding me to keep something off from me. And another of my being intensely grateful to her—heaven only knows why!—and embracing her passionately.

"I would not have told you that last one, except that when I saw your Miss Kefra today it was forced back into my mind as a reality, not as a dream, and I'm so far away from youth and all it means, now, as to confess that it may have been real. For I'm perfectly certain that girl could tempt Saint Anthony himself, if she wished."

"And is tempting the Anthony without the Saint," Gees commented.

"Undoubtedly! But now you see. The amazing, perfect likeness, as if that girl who fooled me—oh, she fooled me wonderfully!—as if she had been resurrected exactly as she was then. Gordon, she's no wife for your friend, whatever her own record may be. With the same name, she belongs to a family that only a generation back consorted with your country's enemies, and belonged in a gang which could kill another woman by mauling her as might a tiger. No, it's a tainted source."

"And if the taint persists, Tony Briggs is in no state to perceive it," Gees added. "A woman with the head of a lioness, purring like a cat. Yes. Yes, I see."

"That was obviously a dream, though a vivid one," the general said.

"One that you were not meant to remember," Gees told him.

"You mean—confound it, boy, what do you mean?"

"I mean this is the most interesting thing I've struck since Hector was a pup," Gees answered with sudden and incautious enthusiasm. "If I told you, you wouldn't believe it. Father, my confidential agency is going to work free gratis and all for nothing—it's started already, as a matter of fact. What you've told me convinces me that this engagement has got to be smashed, though I started by thinking it a fool idea. It isn't."

"Then what do you intend doing?" his father inquired interestedly.

"I'll hear what Eve Madeleine has to say in the morning."

"Eve Madeleine? And who on earth is Eve Madeleine?"

"She's only that when she's absent. To her face, she's Miss Brandon. She'll have a report of some sort for me tomorrow."

"You're not going to tangle her in an affair like this?"

"She's in it up to the neck already, Father, and glad of the chance. She's no fool, I assure you."

"She's a very charming girl, Gordon."

"Quite. I often pat myself on the back over choosing her."

"Yes, you showed good taste," the general said dryly. "In view of my experience with this Miss Kefra's relative, though, you had better be careful not to expose Miss Brandon to any risks."

"Such as a woman with the head of a lioness, purring like a cat."

"Don't talk balderdash, Gordon! I merely told you that to illustrate the impossibility of separating dreams from reality, while in a state of amnesia. To show that all may have been dreams."

"Quite so, Father—and is life anything else?"

"You mean—you attach importance to those fantastic visions?"

"I mean, for any man to tell his own son things like that takes courage, and though I've never doubted yours this is my first chance of seeing it. You're playing high for Tony's sake, Father, and I've got a liking for him, too. On top of which, the cow in the fairway is my especial meat, so what have you?"

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"I don't know," Sir George Green confessed solemnly, as if the final sentence had been a real question.

"No. Nor me either." They spoke no more about it until Gees was about to go. Then the old man gripped Gee's arm tightly.

"Good night, Father."

"Good night, my boy, and take care of your Eve Madeleine."

CHAPTER III

LOST LITTLE ERNIE

"SWAGGER," Miss Brandon whispered to herself. "Oh, very swagger! But why the police inspector?" She loitered by the railings of the square gardens, just across the road from the high, bronze-and-plate-glass entrance to Gravenor Mansions. By moving a few steps in either direction, she could see nearly all of the spacious, high-ceiled entrance hall, decorated in mauve and silver, marble-floored, with a sort of Grecian-urn frieze high up on the walls, and here and there plaques of classic design.

There were two elevators. By one of the two massive pairs of outer doors, just inside the hall, stood an obvious police inspector, talking earnestly to a six-foot attendant in a silver-braided mauve uniform.

Miss Brandon moved on a few steps, halted, and turned, wishing the police inspector out of the way.

Rouge, lipstick, and powder, skilfully used, had made wondrous changes in her face; she looked, as she had intended, rather down on her luck; an ancient fox-fur coat showed bare patches on its deep lapels and cuffs—she had bought it earlier in the evening at a Berwick Market stall. Her shoes were good, but both silk stockings were badly laddered, as her short woollen skirt revealed.

When the police inspector emerged, she began walking away from her post, in the direction that he took, until he had got far enough ahead to disregard her. Then she faced about and, crossing the road, went to Gravenor Mansions' entrance, where the tall attendant in uniform swung the door and looked down at her hat rather sourly.

"And what might you be wanting, miss?" he inquired.

"Could I see the caretaker, please?" she asked in reply.

"About little Ernie, is it?" he demanded, with a change to eagerness.

"Little Ernie?" she echoed. "No, it ain't about little Ernie, it's about meself. Who is little Ernie, anyhow?"

"He's the caretaker's little boy, an' he's lorst," the attendant informed her, with a return to cold aloofness.

"Well, could I see the caretaker?" she persisted, after a pause.

"You couldn't," he answered decidedly. " 'E's hout—I mean, he's out. Nigh off his rocker about the kid, too."

"Ow," she said dubiously.

"What chew want the caretaker for?" her interlocutor demanded.

"I thought"—she gave him a swift, coquettish glance and lowered her gaze again—"you see, Lucy Parker—she's a friend of mine—she told me they sometimes want maids here, and I thought—" She broke off and twisted her gloved fingers together in apparent nervousness.

He moved away to swing the heavy door for a couple entering—a couple on whom Miss Brandon instantly turned her back. Mauve-and-silver solemnly escorted Cleo Kefra and Tony Briggs to one of the automatic elevators. The attendant returned to her.

"You can't stand about in 'ere, you know," he said, not unkindly.

"Why, what's the harm if I do?" she demanded, smiling saucily.

"Well, y'know, this place is clarss, that's what it is."

"An' I ain't clarss. Is that what chew mean?"

"I dunno about that." He looked uncomfortable at her half-smiling, satiric gaze. "I come off at ten," he said.

"Ow! An' it's only a little after nine, now. I could do with a little refreshment,

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too. D'you know anywhere round here?"

"Baker's Arms—private bar," he answered, with a certain eagerness. "It's quiet, an' quite refined. Sid'll serve you, an' if you tell him you're a friend o' Phil Vincent's, he'll look arter you."

"Ow," she said again, rather solemnly.

"You will be there, won't you?" he asked anxiously.

"Ten o'clock ain't long," she answered.

"I told you my name—you ain't told me yours," he pointed out.

"Grace Pottert—that's me. An' you're sure there ain't no places goin' here? I was parlormaid in me last place."

"It ain't no use your lookin' for the caretaker. Mr. Katzenbaum hisself engages all the staff, an' you'd have to go to his office. But I will see you at Baker's Arms? You'll be there?"

"I'm going there now." She moved toward the door.

BUT then she halted, for the door in the corner almost crashed open, and Tony Briggs strode, even clattered, across the marble floor toward the entrance. Hurrying, Phil Vincent got the door swung open for him, and received no reply to his: "Taxi, sir?"

Phil turned back to Miss Brandon as the door swung silently and slowly into its place. He said—"She ain't 'arf combed 'is hair for 'im. I reckon she ain't, by the look of it."

"Why, who are they?" she asked, with evidently intent interest.

"Now, look 'ere," he said persuasively. "If I was to be ketched, talkin' 'ere with you for hours an' hours like this, Mr. Katzenbaum'd ring up the Labor Exchange. I'll tell you all about 'im an' 'er, if you want, round at the Baker's Arms, but not in 'ere, see?"

He held the door for her, as she passed out and remembered to turn to the left.

SO FAR, she reflected, the intuition which she had let guide her had produced a possible source of information, but she had got little out of it. Phil Vincent, too, might prove of more trouble than use, but fully three-quarters of an hour, at least, remained before he would see her again, and she determined to try the Baker's Arms.

She found the private bar door on the first corner, and entered to a clatter of voices. A shirt-sleeved, red-nosed man behind the glass-shuttered bar leaned toward her.

"Any sandwiches?" she inquired.

"Course we got sandwiches, ducky. Wadger like?" he asked.

"I'd like a little politeness, being a friend of Phil Vincent," she told him icily. "And if you've got sandwiches—ham."

"Sus-certaintly, miss," he said, with a complete change of manner. "I didn't know you was one o' the Gravenor bunch. Anything to drink?"

"A small port, please." Previous experience had taught her it was the least noxious compound she could order in a place of this sort.

She reflected, as she seated herself on a leather-covered bench against the wall opposite the bar, that the Gravenor people demanded, or in any case obtained, respectful service. A flaming-haired damsel moved a half-empty stout glass to make room for her and said, "Pardon, ducks," and Sid—if it were Sid—came from behind the bar with a wet rag with which he scrubbed off the area of long table in front of her.

"Nice evening, ain't it?" said the red-haired girl.

"Quite mild for the time of year," Miss Brandon responded pleasantly.

"We don't have the winters they used to get," the other pursued.

"It ought to be snowing, this time of year," Miss Brandon said.

"Yes, and we don't seem to get no snow, do we?"

MISS BRANDON leaned forward and began innocently: "What's this about the caretaker's little boy round at the Gravenor? I've been away, and only just heard about it."

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Red-hair was evidently astonished. "Why, it oughter be in all the papers! Little Ernie kidnaped—anyhow, he's lorst. Four o'clock today. You see, Miss—" She paused, invitingly.

"Oh, just Gracie," Miss Brandon said recklessly.

"And I'm Eileen. Well, you see—do you know Gravenor Mansion, though?"

"I've only been there once, to make an appointment with Phil."

"Then you don't know the Parkoots—the caretaker an' his wife?"

"I believe Phil did mention some name like that," Miss Brandon lied gravely. "But I didn't know they were the caretakers."

"Oo, yes! They *are!* And little Ernie—well, you wouldn't believe! That kid ain't only just over two, but—" She lifted her glass, tilted it, and gurgled once.

"As I was sayin'," she went on, "little Ernie's the apple of his mother's eye. She do look after that kid. But little Ernie's lorst, an' the pleece is on it now, an' Parkoot is ravin' distracted, runnin' up an' down since four o'clock today. You'd think half London was lorst, the way he's carryin' on."

"How did it happen?" Miss Brandon asked, and, taking another bite at her sandwich, realized that she had a long way to go.

"Happen?" Eileen echoed, in high treble. "Why, there wasn't any happen about it! Mrs. Parkoot left the door on the jar—they're basement, but the door is top of the steps, leadin' into the vestibule—where you go in—*you* know! An' little Ernie must of got out. Sweet kid, he is. Why, they all make a fuss of him. There's the Earl of Batwindham in number three. There's him, and that Slugger Potwin—him which used to be the heavy champ, which has the flat opposite the earl's—he'd lay down his life for little Ernie, if it wasn't too expensive. And that Miss Kefra, which they say got so much money she don't know what to do with it—why, Mrs. Parkoot herself told me in here Miss Kefra took that kid up in her arms an' kissed him. An' since four o'clock today little Ernie is lorst, nobody knows where."

Another bite—the ham was delicious, but the bread was thick—and Miss Brandon put down the wreckage of the sandwich, finally. "But somebody must know where," she said, as soon as she could speak.

"That's just *it!*" Eileen declared, with some excitement. "Phil is on all this afternoon, as I reckon *you* know! Little Ernie must've come up into the vestibule with the door on the jar, like it was, an' Phil must've seen the kid—but he didn't. And you know, being a friend of Phil's—you know he'd see if as much as a mouse come into that vestibule—couldn't *help* seeing. And yet he didn't see little Ernie, which has disappeared."

"Supposing Mrs. Parkoot left a window open?" Miss Brandon suggested.

"My dee-ear!" Eileen's negative was final. "In a basement well with a twenty-foot wall, an' no way out! An' the kid not three yet!"

"It all sounds very mysterious," Miss Brandon said, and, perforce, moved a few inches nearer her companion. For Phil Vincent, although it was not yet ten o'clock, loomed on her other side, and crowded down into the small available space beside her, grinning widely.

"Darlin', I knew you was a sport!" he said. And, with no more preface, in sight of all the habitués of the private bar, he thrust out an arm, snatched her close, and kissed her full on the lips, blatantly, vigorously—and sickeningly.

She thrust free of his hold, and stood up. Struggling, she got past Eileen, and, unresponsive to Phil's—" 'Ere, I say!' " got clear and made her way out to the street. There, lest Phil should follow, she ran until she reached the security of the square in which Gravenor Mansions radiated respectability, and thrust out a hand at a crawling taxi. Somebody came out of the shadows to halt beside her and take her arm.

"I say!" he said sympathetically.

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She turned on him, tigress-wise. "I've been kissed!" she exclaimed. "Do you hear?"

He asked, unemotionally, "Do you wish to lay a charge, Miss Brandon? The name, I conjecture, is Philip Vincent."

"The name? I want to go home—do *you* hear? Nothing else, but to go home! If I'd known!"

Inspector Tott opened the door of the taxi, which had stopped beside them. Still holding her arm, he helped her in, and then gave the driver her address. Then, before closing the door, he looked in on her.

He said. "Green ought to have known better—tell him so. And he'll get nothing on the Kefra woman this way. If he wants to know anything about that kidnaping, tell him I've got the whole story. Except —there ain't any, apart from the kid's disappearance."

"Oh, tell him to go on!" she begged desperately.

"Righty-ho, miss." He closed the door on her, and the taxi moved away, leaving him at the pavement edge, a melancholy, unperturbed figure of a man.

CHAPTER IV

THE GRAVENOR'S DOORMAN

A SLIGHT shudder marked the end of Miss Brandon's recital. Gees, perched on the end of her desk with a folded newspaper under his arm, eyed her sympathetically, and offered his open cigarette case.

"No, thank you. I don't feel like smoking."

"Philip Vincent, eh?" he reflected. "Well, Philip Vincent is going to get it and get it good. Oh, yes! I'll attend to him myself, shortly. I'm very sorry, Miss Brandon."

"And all of it so absolutely futile!" she exclaimed bitterly.

"I'd say, very far from futile!" he dissented. "Two things stick out, to me. One, that Tony and Cleo Kefra had a peach of a row, from what you tell me of his exit. The other—well, I don't know, quite. But the evening papers may tell."

She gazed up at him, questioningly. "Tell what, Mr. Green?"

"Little Ernie, you say, was missing since four o'clock, with only one available way out from the caretaker's quarters. They'd have their own entrance somewhere round the side or at the back, naturally, and he might have got out that way, but on the scrappy evidence you got it's not likely. Apparently that door 'on the jar' let him into the entrance hall, where this Philip Vincent was on duty."

"And therefore must have seen him, if he had gone that way," she pointed out. "The entrance hall is absolutely bare, and it was quite impossible for the child to appear in it without Vincent seeing him."

"The child is so small that Miss Kefra took him up in her arms and kissed him. Just over two years old, according to your Eileen. Could a toddler like that push one of those metal and glass doors open?"

"No," she said decidedly. "But somebody might have—"

"Let him out, you were going to say," Gees finished for her. "One of the tenants there? They all know the child, apparently, and the worst sort of moron would not let a two-year-old child into the street alone.

"Even then, kidnaping in the street is practically out of the question—small kids aren't such valuable commodities in these days that people risk picking 'em up on sight and running off with 'em. Also, that square in the middle of the afternoon has got taxis on a rank nearly opposite the Gravenor entrance, I happen to know, and there are chauffeurs with cars waiting about—somebody would have seen the child if he had been snatched up in the street, and since the police are on to it they'd have got information about it."

"You mean—little Ernie is somewhere in the building?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Not now," he said very gravely, and, unfolding his newspaper, put it down before her. "Take a look at that."

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He put a finger on a staring headline: *Ghastly Discovery on Wimbledon Common* and, after a glance up at him, she read:

Shortly after midnight, P.C. Ambrose Wright discovered a fiber suit-case, half-hidden among some gorse bushes on Wimbledon Common, nearly opposite the pond beside the Kingston Road. On opening the case, he was horrified to discover the nude and terribly mutilated body of a male child, apparently about two years of age. The child's throat was fearfully lacerated, and this and other injuries make it appear that the tragedy was due to an attack by some large, carnivorous animal of the cat species.

P.C. Wright, at the time of the discovery, was patrolling from Kingston toward the top of Putney Hill. The point at which he found the case is within a dozen yards of the main road, which, even at that late hour, is far from deserted. Three cars, Wright states, passed him, going in the direction of the Kingston bye-pass, between the entrance to the cemetery and the top of the hill, a distance of about four hundred yards—or less. Rime on the grass went to prove that the case had been thrown toward the bushes from the road, since it had fallen into position after the ground-frost had whitened the grass, and there were no footprints, except for those made by the constable himself, in the vicinity. In all probability the case was thrown from a passing car, since, if a pedestrian had been carrying it, he would almost certainly have attracted notice from others using this stretch of road.

A far greater number of people, both children and adults, is missing at any given time than is generally supposed, and, so far, no clue is available as to the identity of this unfortunate infant. The suit-case, a cheap, fiber-and-cane article, well-worn, bears no labels or distinguishing marks by which it might be traced. There is a possibility that a child belonging to some traveling menagerie might have strayed too near the cages containing savage beasts, and that the parents disposed of the body in this way to avert inquiries and subsequent trouble. Against this is the fact that no menageries are known to have been on the roads in this district for weeks past.

Medical examination will, of course, reveal more fully the way in which the child came by his death, but it already appears certain that no human agency is responsible.

Miss Brandon looked up. She said, "Very—badly—written," rather shakily, and Gees saw that she had lost color.

"I'd dissent, by the effect it's had on you," he said. "But with this—the ability to connect up these two things before any others make the connection, your trip last night was very far from futile, you see. It enables me to get on to Tony Briggs before *he* can connect up."

"But—but what on earth do you mean?" she asked fearfully.

"I don't know myself," he confessed. "Between the British Museum and my father, and what I already knew—and this Cleo Kefra herself—I'm utterly puzzled. Only—it's all wrong—all wrong!"

ABRUPTLY he snatched up the telephone receiver from its rest on her desk, put it to his ear, and dialled. "Mr. Briggs—Mr. Anthony Briggs, please," he said, when he got his response. Then—"Mr. Green."

After a pause, "Hullo, Tony. Gees speaking. I suppose you're not available for lunch today?" He frowned. "No, I thought you wouldn't be. Too bad. Well, look here. The nearest Lyons to the Parliament end of Whitehall—blow in and look for me in about twenty minutes, and I'll buy the coffee. Right?"

Miss Brandon watched him nod and smile at the response he got.

"Ah! Yes, I see! Leaving you desolate, is she? Well, that accounts for it. Yes. In twenty minutes."

He replaced the receiver, and again took out his cigarette case. Miss Brandon took one this time. He said, "I can walk it in ten minutes, from here," and lighted up for her and himself.

"She ought to have been dark," she said abruptly.

"I believe the mummies go to show they were not all dark," he dissented. "The early dynasties. Besides—" he broke off, thoughtfully. "Probably in all Egypt today

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there are not more than half a dozen families—maybe not more than one or two—of the pure-blooded race that was, in the days of the Pharaohs. The present race is mongrel, more Arab than anything else, and she's got no Arab blood in her, by my reckoning."

"Mr. Green, you're not thinking of connecting *her* with the murder of that child?" she asked, with sudden fear.

"I tell you I don't know a thing!" he exclaimed, with equally sudden irritation. "Sorry, Miss Brandon—I didn't mean to bark. I'll get along, now, and—do forgive me for landing you with that mess last night, won't you?"

"Why, of course, Mr. Green! It wasn't your fault in the least."

TWO minutes later, with his hat in his hand, he paused again in the doorway. "I may have another commission for you, Miss Brandon," he said. "Tony Briggs tells me *she's* going away for a few days, and I may want you to keep track of her. I'll know better after I've seen him, though. I'll be back in an hour or so."

Tony Briggs was prompt and unruffled. There was just a suggestion of pouter pigeon in his bearing, and his pink-and-white face wore the expression of virtue rewarded.

"Quite a cheery party yesterday, wasn't it?" he said, patting the tablecloth. "I thought your Miss Brandon was looking remarkably attractive. Have you fallen for her yet?"

"With you as an object lesson in falling, I'm keeping on my feet," Gees said gravely. "And to anticipate your next remark—she is."

"What?" Tony asked.

"All that, and then some. Did you take her back after lunch?"

"Well, naturally!"

"Took the whole of the afternoon off, huh?"

"I did not! I took her as far as the Gravenor and then came back to work—in the same taxi. You seem to think I never work!"

"Didn't even go up to her flat with her for a quiet goodbye? Tony, don't strain my credulity too far!"

"Honestly old man! I saw her to the lift, and left her."

"I must have independent evidence on that. Get the one-headed Cerberus in that entrance hall to testify to it on oath."

"Oh, cut it out! Besides, he was nowhere in sight—we had the entrance hall to ourselves."

"Aha! Let me see. . . . Three o'clock or thereabouts when you left the Berkeley, quarter of an hour to Gravenor Mansions, and call it twenty minutes from there to your office. Bet you a bob, Tony, with that entrance hall to yourselves, you weren't back before half past four."

"Hand over," and Tony stretched out his hand. "I was well settled at my desk when I heard Big Ben chime a quarter past. Fact and honor, Gees. One shilling, please."

With apparent reluctance Gees took a shilling from his pocket and handed it over. He said, "Even allowing for traffic holdups, that gives you twenty minutes to say goodbye in that entrance hall."

"What the blazes is it to you if it does?" Tony demanded irritably.

"Sorry, Tony—you know I was only clowning. But you said on the phone she's going away today. Where's she off to—back to Egypt?"

"If she were," Tony said decidedly, "I'd find some excuse for going there too. No, she's got a place she rented furnished down in Gloucestershire, and I'm seeing her off for Cheltenham after lunch. Staying there till Tuesday week, and I go down for two long weekends and come back with her after the second."

"Uh-huh! What's your lady mother say about it?"

"Oh, blast it, Gees, you've got a nasty mind! And this isn't the Victorian age, either. Besides, she's having Lady Bender-neck to stay with her, and other people as well, probably."

"Cheltenham, eh? Sleepy place. I don't care for it."

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"But she's not *in* Cheltenham," Tony said. "Her place is miles out—Barnby-under-something Grange, it's called, but if she didn't take an express through to Cheltenham she'd be pottering about half the day at wayside stations on a slow train. Her man meets her there with the car—meets me, too, tomorrow evening when I go down. So there you are. Do I step down from the witness box, or do you cross-examine further?"

"M'lud, no further questions."

Tony smiled. "You haven't told me what you thought of Cleo."

"What could I tell you?" Gees countered. "You had only to see the way other people took her entry to realize you had far the most interesting woman—girl—in the place. She's got a brain like—like a linotype machine, which they say is seven men's brains, and she dresses as well as you do, which is saying much. I've never seen such eyes, and her voice is a revelation in perfection of tone. Any more?"

"That's quite enough," Tony said, rather grimly.

"What's more important to me is her opinion of me."

"To be absolutely frank," Tony told him, "you did not make a good impression. In fact—well—never mind, though."

Back to Gees' recollection came Miss Brandon's account of the way in which Tony had charged through that entrance hall and out from the block of mansions, the night before. He nodded, gravely. "I won't," he said, and drank the last of his coffee.

"*I* thought you were rather bristly, somehow," Tony said. "Not quite your usual self, when you were talking to her."

Gees said nothing and presently they finished their coffee, paid up and separated.

GEES meandered thoughtfully along Whitehall, came to a full stop and made for a telephone booth, inserted two pennies, and dialed. After a brief delay he got Inspector Tott, who demanded very irritably what he wanted.

"To stand you lunch at the Junior Nomads, Inspector," he answered. "Today, one-fifteen. Can do?"

"Can *not* do, thanking you all the same, *Mister* Green," Tott snapped at him. "I told you when I came to see you that this was not an affair for any official action, and that's that."

"Then why were you hanging around the Gravenor last night?" Gees demanded.

"None of your business."

Gees laughed softly into the transmitter. "Don't hang up for a second, Inspector. You heard about the missing child, of course?"

"Being investigated by that division."

"Has Parkoot—I believe that is the name—has he been to Wimbledon yet to see if he can identify the body found last night?"

"Here! What on earth are you getting at?" Tott demanded sharply.

One-fifteen, at the Junior Nomads. Change your mind, Inspector," Gees suggested. "I really need official backing for something I want to do in *that* case, not in the other."

"All—right, Mr. Green," Toot answered, after a long pause. "But if you *are* thinking of leading me up on some blasted—"

Gees mumbled his entire innocence of sublety, hung up and emerged from the booth to gaze at a "Lunch Edition" poster, sight of which prompted him to buy a copy. The late news column gave him what he sought—

SUITCASE MYSTERY

The body of a male child found in a suitcase just after midnight on Wimbledon Common has been identified by Mr. Edwin Parkoot, of Gravenor Mansions, as that of his son Ernest, whose disappearance was reported to the police yesterday afternoon. It is understood that figures on the suitcase indicate that it was purchased recently, and inquiries are being pursued with a view to tracing the purchaser.

"Bah!" said Gees to himself. He handed it back to the man from whom he had bought it.

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"Finished with it," he said. "You can have it."

He walked on toward Charing Cross. "Oh, Lord, be good to them, somehow!" he murmured. "It must be hell to lose a child any way, and that way—be good to them somehow!"

"THIS is Mr. Green, Crampton." Tott introduced the quietly dressed man who joined them after lunch. "Inspector Crampton, Mr. Green. And I might tell you, Crampton, that what he's got to say may be worth hearing, though he's got no official standing. He was in the Force for two years some while ago, and a damned nuisance he was, too, but he's got an indirect line on this kidnaping business that neither you nor I has a chance of getting. It's your case, so I'm handing him over to you, as he asked."

"Yes, I know your agency," Crampton said. "And you think you might be able to give us a helping hand over this Parkoot business?"

"Well, thank you very much, Mr. Green, for my good lunch, and I'll leave you to Crampton," Tott put in. "See you soon, Crampton."

"I don't know that I can give you much, Inspector," Gees said, "but I may clear up a point or two. Is it possible to have a word with Parkoot, or is he—"

"He's cold fury," Crampton said, "and only too anxious to do anything to get his hands on whoever did it, poor chap. *She's* down and out—you can't see her. But you want—"

"To find out things," Gees finished. "Can you come along with me and see Parkoot? He'll be at the Gravenor?"

"We'll go right along," Crampton promised. "But"—as they went toward the street—"do you mind telling me where you come in? I mean—what's your angle on a case like this?"

"A possible lead to an inquiry of my own," Gees answered, "and since my inquiry couldn't possibly be a police affair—at least, for the present—I shall have to ask you to leave it at that."

"What's good enough for Inspector Tott is good enough for me," Crampton said.

Miss Brandon's description was enough to convince Gees that it was Philip Vincent who swung the heavy door for them when they reached the Gravenor; and he noted Vincent's respectful salute to the inspector. He halted just inside the door to watch it slowly close against the pneumatic cushioning cylinder, and then, grasping the handle, swung it open again.

"You see, Inspector," he said, "that child couldn't have opened it. It's a sixty-pound pull, at least."

"They're kept open in the warm weather, sir," Vincent put in.

"Was any door left open yesterday afternoon?" Gees asked him.

He shook his head. "No, sir," he answered with finality. "Never, in the winter months. Them cylinders have to be taken off, for that."

"And they're all on." Gees gave the man a steady, appraising look, and then turned to the inspector again. "Let's go. Best to get it over with."

But, when Parkoot, a middle-aged, heavily-built and tall man, faced them in the doorway, Gees saw that he had no uncontrolled victim of a tragedy to face. The man was grimly impassive.

"This is Mr. Green, Parkoot," Crampton told him. "He thinks he may be able to help in—well, our investigations."

"If that's so, Mr. Green," Parkoot said slowly, "God will bless you. I know you can't give him back to us, but— Pleased to meet you, sir."

Gees shook his hand heartily, and felt respect for the man's courage. "A few questions, if you don't mind," he said.

PARKOOT came out into the basement corridor, and closed the door softly behind him. "The missus is asleep," he explained.

The cigarette case appeared as Gees leaned against the polished marble wall. Gees lighted up. "As good here as anywhere," he said. "A first question, Mr. Parkoot. That entrance hall is in charge

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of an attendant. Is he supposed to leave it?"

"No, sir."

"Meal times?" Gees asked laconically.

"Relief," Parkoot answered.

"Then that's that. What sort of man is Vincent?"

"Oh, quite reliable, sir, if that's what you mean. He was on yesterday afternoon, when—when it happened, and what I can't make out is *how* it happened that Ernie got out, because the missus was lying down, and our own door at the side was locked. And the door at the top of the stairs was on the jar, but Vincent'll take his dyin' oath the kid never went that way. So—well!"

"Not well," and Gees shook his head, while Crampton maintained an interested silence. "Not much doing up there in mid-afternoon, as a rule, is there, Parkoot?" he asked casually.

"I'd say it's a dull job, but—" He broke off, gloomily.

"How many flats are there in the block?"

"Twenty-two, sir. But if you think—" Again he broke off.

"We've got to prove, not think," Gees told him, and Crampton nodded. "Service here, or do the tenants keep their own servants?"

"Either way, sir. There's accommodation for one servant in each flat—two at a pinch—and our own restaurant and staff."

"I see. Tell me this, then. Why was Vincent absent from that hall for at least twenty minutes, between three-thirty and four yesterday afternoon?"

"That's impossible, sir," Parkoot said firmly. "He wasn't—and he knows it'd cost him his job, too. No, he wasn't."

"Very well, he wasn't. How many of the tenants have their own attendants—living in the flats, I mean?"

"Very few, sir. The trouble of getting servants makes most of 'em rely on our staff for everything. There's—let me see. Lord Batheum—they say that's how you ought to pronounce his name—he's got a maid; that boxer chap, Potwin, keeps an old army man to look after him, and Miss Kefra in number thirteen's got a foreigner, sort of chauffeur and houseman and everything else—but they're away. So is Lord Batheum, as far as that goes, though his maid is still there."

"And the rest depend on your staff, eh? Do the staff have rooms here, or live out? I've a reason for asking."

The chef and his two kitchen lads live in—not the others," Parkoot answered. "Though I don't see how they—"

"Come into it—no. But now I want to take a long chance—a very long chance—and I wish you two'd come with me while I take it. Up to Lord Batheum's flat, if you will."

"I get it," Crampton said quietly. "Yes—let's go."

The caretaker led them along the corridor to the foot of the stairway and pressed a button beside a door. A lift descended almost inaudibly, and stopped. He opened the door, ushered the other two in, and followed them. The lift went up, stopped, and they emerged to a carpeted corridor.

"That's his door, sir." Parkoot pointed as he spoke, and Gees advanced and pressed a bell beside the door.

HE PRESSED again after a long interval, and the door swung open to reveal a tall, pert-looking, rather attractive girl in a black silk uniform.

"His lordship is notatome," she said sharply, before Gees spoke.

"So I understand." He slipped his foot into the door-opening. "You are, I see, just as you were yesterday afternoon. But quite on your own, I take it, today."

"Mr. Parkoot, are you going to stand there and see him insult me?" she demanded shrilly. "Let me shut this door, you! I—" Then she caught sight of Inspector Crampton, and stopped, open-mouthed.

"How long was Vincent in here with you yesterday?" Gees drawled.

"Oo-h! You liar!" she cried and, reddening, gulped.

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"Was it one hour, or two?"

"It wasn't half an hour—" she began—and stopped.

"That's enough, sir," Parkoot said, and turned toward the lift. Inspector Crampton said, "Here!" and went to follow him, but he slid the door closed and went down alone. Gees and the Inspector made for the stairs and raced down; but they knew the lift would beat them.

They came to the main floor just in time to see Parkoot swing Vincent about. From a half crouch he landed one tremendous blow with his right on the point of the jaw, with plenty of weight to back it. Lifted off his feet, Vincent crashed to the marble floor, and Parkoot stood over him. The other two came beside the caretaker, and all three stood waiting until Vincent opened his eyes.

"Get up!" Parkoot's admonition was an almost animal growl. "Get up! Strip that uniform off, and get out, before I kill you!"

Again they waited. Presently Vincent managed to get on his feet, and staggered uncertainly toward the basement stairs and down them.

"Will he come out this way, Parkoot?" Gees asked.

"No, sir. By the side door—it's spring-latched." He held up his hand to look at his skinned knuckles, and even smiled.

"I'd like you to come along with me, Inspector, if you will," Gees said. "I haven't finished with Vincent, yet."

CHAPTER V

ANGRY LADY

"YOU said you were taking a long chance," Inspector Crampton remarked as he followed Gees down to the basement. "You did, too, with that girl. A longer one than I'd care to take."

"And yet it wasn't so very long," Gees told him. "She squealed before she was hurt, gave herself away hopelessly before I accused her of anything. Besides, I was acting on information received—from two entirely independent sources."

"That's his locker room, sir." Parkoot pointed at a door along the corridor. "D'you want me to stay?"

"I think not, Parkoot," Crampton answered, and smiled slightly. "You might kill him, if we didn't hold you back."

"Then I'll get along and ring up the agency to send a man in at once to replace him," Parkoot said, and entered his own quarters, closing his door gently. Crampton pointed at a half-glazed door at the end of the corridor.

"That's the only other way the kid could have got out," he said. "Been taken out, rather, for you can see he couldn't have opened that door himself—couldn't have reached up to that Yale knob to turn the latch."

"How did the child get into this corridor?" Gees asked.

"Mrs. Parkoot left her door open so he could play about in it—he couldn't come to any harm," Crampton explained, "and somehow that door at the top of the stairs, leading to the entrance hall, happened to be left ajar. But how he got out of that hall—"

Gees almost said, "He didn't," but thought better of it. They waited, and finally Vincent, sullen and tight-mouthed, appeared in street clothes.

"We want a word or two with you, Vincent," Crampton said.

"Oh, do you? Well, for a start, I want you to arrest Parkoot for assault. And I'm goin' to get damages out of him, too!"

"Quite a good idea," Gees cooed softly. "Oh, quite a good idea! And don't forget to call that girl in his lordship's flat as evidence."

"So she split, did she, the—"

"Stow it!" Gees barked. "What time was it when you left the hall to go up to that flat yesterday afternoon?"

"Whatever *she* told you," Vincent mumbled, "I was in the hall till over a quarter past three, and I was down again by four o'clock."

"Contradicting each other already, you see," Gees observed.

"I don't care *what* she told you!" Vin-

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cent almost shouted. "I'll take oath on it—I wasn't away more'n forty minutes at the outside."

"Three-fifteen to four o'clock, call it," Crampton commented. "The period in which the child disappeared."

"Nobody asked *me* to keep an eye on the kid," Vincent said sullenly.

"Many people in and out during the afternoon, as a rule?" Gees asked him.

"Hardly anyone, between three and five," he answered.

"Did you stay in the entrance hall all the rest of the time yesterday?"

"Yerss, I did, except when I give Miss Kefra's man a hand with her trunks, because he was takin' 'em down to her car, so's to be there to meet her today. An' goin' outside to get taxis for people. Her, for one, when she went out to dinner."

"Did you leave the hall to help with the trunks before or after getting a taxi for Miss Kefra?"

"Before—no, it was after, a good quarter'n hour after. Why—what's that got to do with it? The kid warn't in the trunks—the police was lookin' for 'im, by that time. After eight, it was."

"Now what gave you the idea of connecting the child with the trunks, I wonder?" Gees mused.

"I didn't do nuthin' o' the sort!" Vincent protested indignantly. "I said he *warn't* in the trunks, that's all. I seen Miss Kefra pick that kid up an' kiss him, one day when the door was left on the jar before an' he happened to stray up into the hall when she was comin' down in the lift, an' that old dodderer of a man of hers couldn't swat a fly if he tried. An' the kid was snatched away out of here."

"Yes, snatched away out of here," Gees mused aloud again. "I expect you'll see the suitcase at the inquest, and be able to tell if it went out from here yesterday while you *were* in the hall."

"No suitcase of *any* sort went out!" Vincent protested. "An' that kid was snatched out alive, not took out dead in a case. Kidnapers, that's what it was."

They left the man to himself and ascended to the empty entrance hall. There Gees paused.

"Do you happen to have any list of the people here?" he asked.

Crampton felt in his breast pocket and produced a white sheet.

In silence Gees looked down the list. Again *No. 13* he saw the names of *Miss Cleo Kefra* and *Saleh ibn Nahor, personal attendant*. He refolded the paper and handed it back.

"Thank you," he said. "No, it couldn't be anyone here."

"Well, I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Green," Crampton told him. "Now do you wish to make any more inquiries?"

Gees shook his head. "Not now, thanks," he answered. "If—*if* the business that's interesting me just now should happen to cross any of your line, I know where to get in touch with you."

As he went on his way, he murmured to himself: "Saleh ibn Nahor—" Then he took out an envelope and pencil, and wrote the name down. Then he hailed a taxi to take him to Little Oakfield Street for tea with Miss Brandon.

BUT tea with Miss Brandon was not the peaceful function Gees anticipated. He had just seated himself on the corner of her desk when the doorbell began a peal that suggested a desire to run the battery down. Gees got on his feet.

"I'll go, Miss Brandon." He went to the door and opened it. "Easy, man," Gees admonished, ignoring the ominous expression on Tony Briggs' face.

"I want to know," Tony began coldly, "why you—"

"Not here," Gees interrupted. "Come inside."

In angry silence Tony followed him to his room. He pointed to the deep-seated, leather-upholstered chair.

"I don't want to sit down," Tony said stubbornly.

"I do," Gees observed, and did. "Now, go ahead."

"I want to know what you"—Tony

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paused to correct himself, and went on with meticulous care—"what was the idea of Miss Brandon, in obvious disguise, masquerading in the entrance hall of Gravenor Mansions last night. Spying there, in fact. By your orders?"

"Oh, the Parkoot business," Gees said. "That missing kid. Yes. Wait a second—I'll get Miss Brandon herself along to explain." He pressed the buzzer on his desk, and offered his cigarette case.

"No!" said Tony, savagely.

Gees took one for himself. "Oh, Miss Brandon," he said as she entered, "you've met Briggs. He wants to know what you mean by being at Gravenor Mansions last night. I'm just back from my talk with Crampton, but you'd better tell him how we're interested in this case of the missing child—and the finding of the body out at Wimbledon, and all the rest of it." He gave her a long look.

"I went to Gravenor Mansions last night, Mr. Briggs," Miss Brandon said coolly, "and obtained some information about the missing child—long before it was connected with the Wimbledon tragedy—which Mr. Green was good enough to say was very useful. Is that all, Mr. Green?"

Gees got on his feet. "You see, Tony? There's no connection between Miss Brandon's visit to the Gravenor and you or anyone you know there. Now what's the trouble?"

"I—well—Miss Kefra recognized Miss Brandon, obviously disguised, last night—" Tony broke off.

"And chalked another dark stroke against my already unattractive name," Gees finished for him. "You ought to realize, Tony, that my agency goes in for all sorts of investigations. So there you are, Tony, blaming me for a sheer coincidence. Why?"

"Miss Kefra thought—" Tony began, and stopped.

"Supposing *I* started thinking!" Gees exclaimed with angry energy. "Supposing I alleged that one of Miss Kefra's trunks, taken out of her flat last night by her man, had inside it the suitcase which held the body of that child— No, shut up, Tony! I've got just as much right to allege an absurdity like that as you have to come here and accuse me of setting Miss Brandon on to spy on Miss Kefra. Now you can either apologize and stay for a cup of tea, or get out."

"I apologize humbly to you both," Tony said. "But I mustn't stay now."

"Look here, Tony, what time do you go to her country place tomorrow?"

"By the same train she took today," Tony said. "Cleo's meeting me at Cheltenham with her car, and Lady Benderneck is traveling down with me."

"Well, then—when do you start back? Monday?"

Tony nodded.

"Well, look here. I shall be down Shropshire way myself on Sunday. Suppose I pick you up at ten Monday morning? Then I could have a word with Miss Kefra and wipe this blot off my scutcheon."

"Ye-es," Tony assented, very dubiously.

"Fine!" Gees exclaimed. "Now what's the address?"

"It's the Grange, Barnby-under-Hedlington. I've never been there, so I can't tell you anything about the road—"

"Leave it to me," Gees interposed, "and count on seeing me somewhere round ten on Monday morning."

"I really must go now, Gees," Tony said, glancing at his wristwatch. "Awfully sorry about this misunderstanding—"

"I'll clear it all up before I fetch you away on Monday morning," Gees interrupted, accompanying him out into the corridor.

"But if you're looking into this affair of the missing child—" Tony half-questioned, pausing in his stride.

"Oh, my part in that is finished, now—I've handed it over to Inspector Crampton."

He went into Miss Brandon's room after closing the door on Tony. She said: "So I *was* futile, after all."

"On the other hand, Miss Brandon,

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this bee in the lady's bonnet—the one that fetched Tony here with murder in his eye as soon as he had said goodbye to her—it clinches things. People don't imagine they're being shadowed like that unless there's some reason for shadowing them."

"You suspect—what?" she asked. "Not that she had anything to do with the disappearance of that child, surely?"

"An open mind," he answered, "is as useful as a pocket corkscrew." He held one up as he spoke. "I might be able to tell you more when I get back next Tuesday."

"But I thought it was to be Monday."

"You'd be surprised. Meanwhile, Miss Brandon, Vincent took the count in the Gravenor entrance hall today, and is now one of the unemployed, thanks to me."

She put the teapot down on the tray and stared at him, silently.

"Well—that's something," she said nervously. "But—but I wish you'd tell me —about Miss Kefra—"

"I assure you there's absolutely nothing to tell—yet," he said. He smiled at her, but she found no smile of her own to answer with.

CHAPTER VI

THE CATS OF SEKHMET

SLENDERER, even, than she normally appeared, and to Tony Briggs bewilderingly alluring, Cleo Kefra let him hold her close for almost a minute, and then drew away.

"Your friend will be here at any moment," she said. "Have you had breakfast"—she glanced at the table—"or did you wait for me?"

"Of course I waited, darling," he told her. "As if—but there's a wire from him. I shall have to ask you to turn the car out to take me to Cheltenham, after all. He's broken down. He may get here this afternoon. There's the wire."

Glancing at the top of the message, she saw it had been handed in at Ludlow at 8.38 A.M., and put it down to turn to Tony.

"I will order the car for you, dear," she said, and, advancing one slippered, tiny foot, set it on a bellpush in front of her. After that, she seated herself, and gestured him to the place opposite her.

"So—I must tell him you have gone," she said. "Or leave word for him, perhaps. Darling, get me one kidney, and no bacon."

Going to the sideboard, he uncovered the dish, and hesitated.

"They look badly underdone, to me, Cleo," he said dubiously.

"But they are not, really," she said. "One, please."

Carefully, even distastefully, he transferred two halves of kidney from the dish to a warmed plate, which he put down before her. The service gave him opportunity to lean down and kiss her.

"You're so lovely, Cleo! I hoped you'd have been down sooner, since it's my last morning here.

She laughed. "Until Friday—five days! Darling, this is very early for me. I come alive at night, not with the morning."

A wizened, wrinkled, five-foot-nothing, white-haired, clean-shaven man, with startlingly youthful blue eyes noiselessly entered. He said: "You rang, madam?"

"Quite five minutes ago, Saleh," Cleo Kefra answered. "You will be ready with the car to take Mr. Briggs to Cheltenham in half an hour. That is all."

"Thank you, madam," and he closed the door, leaving them alone again. Whereupon Tony bent down for another kiss, but her hand restrained him. She said, "No, darling. Else, you would go back starved."

"I do,' he said significantly. "But—"

He went to the sideboard, and chose a slice of cold ham and a poached egg. She poured his tea, and coffee for herself. The halves of kidney showed crimson and dripped redly as she cut them, but the coffee urn and spirit kettle masked her eating from Tony's sight. He caught her glance at him, and sighed.

"Five days, darling," he said. "Why must you come here?"

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"But such days!" she told him, and laughed.

"Cleo, how soon will you marry me?" he asked abruptly, leaning toward her across the table.

She laughed softly. "It is not yet a week since we became engaged."

"I know, but—how soon, darling?"

She shook her head. "I cannot tell you yet."

"Is there—you have only yourself to consider?" he asked anxiously.

"Only myself," she answered slowly. "I am quite alone."

"Then why—?" he began, and broke off.

"Not yet—I cannot tell you yet," she repeated, and rose to come and stand beside him. "Do not insist, Tony—let it wait for a time. We can be together, as now."

"I want all of you, Cleo," he said rather indistinctly.

"So?" She spoke the monosyllable softly, thoughtfully. One less blind than was he might have said that she was quite unimpressed. But he lifted the hand she had laid on his shoulder, and put it to his lips.

"Your friend—when will he arrive?"

"My— Oh, you mean Gees! I've no idea, darling. Too late to get me to London in time, or he wouldn't have sent that wire. He says four o'clock, but since he's had some sort of breakdown it may be later."

"Does a Rolls-Bentley break down?" she asked thoughtfully.

"He may have hit something. But—did he tell you he drives a Rolls-Bentley, darling?" he inquired, gazing up at her in surprise.

She nodded. "When we lunched with him," she said.

"I don't remember—" He was frowning in an effort at recalling any mention of Gees' car when Cleo drew her hand away and stood back from him as the door opened to admit a tall, elderly woman. Tony rose to his feet. "Good morning, Lady Benderneck," he said.

"Morning, Tony. Cleo, my dear, I must go back to town. I'm very sorry—a case of illness in the family. Can you arrange for me to be driven to the station?"

"If you must go, Sarah," Cleo said, "Tony is being driven to Cheltenham in half an hour or a little less. Perhaps you could go with him—or would that be too soon?"

"It would suit me admirably—the sooner I can get back, the better. I'm so sorry to leave you here alone, darling."

"Why not come back with us?" Tony asked, rather eagerly. "Being alone in a place like this in the middle of winter is not too good."

Cleo shook her head. "I shall stay," she said. "You can come down again for next weekend, Sarah?"

"I hope so," Lady Benderneck said dubiously. "I will let you know, dear, as soon as I know myself. But must you stay here?"

"I shall not go back with you," Cleo answered, a trifle coldly.

When they were alone, Tony gazed out from the window at the stretch of moat, which extended all round the old house. Its surface was blackly sullen in the light of the clouded morning.

"You can't stay alone in a place like this, Cleo," he said.

"I have to, Tony," she said, and shivered. "When you come back Friday, I may be able to answer the question you ask so persistently."

"You mean it, Cleo?" He faced about and took her in his arms.

"I may. I am not sure."

"Darling, I love you so terribly!"

"Is it terrible, my Tony? Now let me go—I must dress to see you off. Five minutes—ten minutes at most, and I shall be with you again."

A HALF hour later, with baggage loaded on the car, Tony sat in beside Lady Benderneck and heard her sigh of relife as Sahel, wizened and brown and competent, drove over the bridge that spanned the moat.

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"Why she chose such a place I cannot think," Lady Benderneck remarked rather acidly. "Such an eerie, ghostly place. And those cats!"

"Cats?" he asked, surprised. "I didn't see any cats."

"Two—more like small tigers than cats, except that they were not striped. Big, tawny things—I heard a noise outside my room last night, and looked out—they were in the corridor. I shut the door at once. The one that I saw clearly had china-blue eyes, like a Siamese, but they were two large for Siamese. *Much* too large!"

"I must ask Cleo about them," he said. "*I* never saw any cats." Leaning forward, he slid open the glass partition separating them from the driver. "Saleh, her ladyship tells me she saw two big cats outside her room last night. Are they yours?"

Momentarily, the car swayed, as if for an instant the man had let the steering wheel swing in his hands. Then it steadied.

"There are no cats, sir," he said.

"But I saw them, outside my room!" Lady Benderneck insisted.

"Then they must have been prowling in the night and got in, your ladyship," he answered her, without looking round, "for Miss Kefra has no cats at the Grange, nor have I, nor the maids."

"It's very mysterious," Lady Benderneck said with emphatic disapproval. "I saw two—large, dangerous-looking cats, in the middle of the night. It's *most* mysterious!"

"I wish Cleo hadn't insisted on staying on there alone," Tony said.

. . . The still, dull, winter's day was near its end when Gees got his first view of the boxlike, Georgian outline of the Grange, and saw, too, three sides of the oblong moat which surrounded house and grounds—an area of nearly two acres.

The place looked neglected; the parapets of the gray stone bridge over which he must drive to come at the house needed repair; shrubs and trees looked unkempt; and last year's grass lay lank and dead on the borders of flower beds and round the edges of the lawn.

The house was set on a massive substructure of darker, more aged-looking stone than its upper part, indicating that an eighteenth-century builder had set his edifice on the foundations of an earlier structure.

He entered the portico and pressed an incongruous bellpush—its bright newness emphasized the need of paint on its surroundings. The opening door revealed Cleo Kefra herself.

"Ah! Mr. Green," she said coolly. "All but one of my servants have fled today, and that one has gone to Hedlington for provisions. So I welcome you myself. Will you come in?"

"Thank you," he answered, with equal lack of warmth, and stepped inside.

He followed her into a high-ceilinged drawing room crowded with ugly Victorian furniture.

"I expected you about this time," Cleo remarked. "Won't you take your coat off? This room is rather warm."

He took off his coat and turned to put it on the bench behind him.

As Cleo Kefra looked up at him, he noted that the pupils of her eyes were dilated in the dim light of the room, rendering them dark and softly lustrous.

"This must be very inconvenient for you, Miss Kefra," he said. "No servants, I mean."

"It will not be inconvenient, since my guests left this morning," she said. "Saleh—he is the man who attends to me in the flat when I am in London—can attend to all my own needs. But draw up a chair."

"But why are you left like this, servantless?" he inquired.

"Some nonsense about ghostly cats, as nearly as I can gather," she answered. "Or *real* cats, trespassing from some nearby farm. I expect"—she smiled slightly—"the village is buzzing with excitement over them, by this time. My three maids all marched away before lunch, and a boy arrived with a hand-cart an hour later to take their belongings. But why—why do you nod your head like that, Mr. Green?"

"Just"—he paused to think hard for a

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reply—"your excellent English. Not a trace of accent in it."

"Why should there be? I have known it . . . it is my language."

THE pause was significant, he felt. She had intended a different end to the sentence. "And Tony couldn't wait for me?" he remarked, stirring his tea.

"He went by train—Saleh drove him to Cheltenham," she said. "And he has already explained what he said you wished to see me about—Miss Brandon, I mean, and that you were interested in the child's disappearance. I am sorry I misconstrued her presence at the Gravenor."

"I am still interested in that child's disappearance," he said slowly, and saw her eyes darken still more.

"I understood it had been found," she said, half-questioningly.

"The body—not the living child," he answered her. "Terribly mauled and clawed, as if by"—he drank the last of his tea, and put the cup back on the tray—"cats," he ended, looking full at her.

"How very strange!" she remarked, with incisive irony.

"And they must pay—all nine lives," he stated with finality.

Outside the room, the light had so far failed that leafless trees had grown shadowy beyond the uncurtained window. Here, they sat in a dimness mitigated only by the firelight, and Cleo's face was all in shadow, since it was turned toward him and away from the fire. But her eyes glowed at him, dark fires in themselves.

"I do not understand," she said.

"Sekhmet herself shall not save them," he said again, somberly.

"Still I do not understand," she repeated.

"Eight-and-thirty years ago, it was a woman's throat that was torn and clawed," he went on deliberately. "Now it is a child's."

"Ah-h!" She breathed rather than uttered the exclamation.

She threw her cigarette end in among the coals of the fire, and then they sat for a long time in silence, each watchful of and waiting on the other.

"You are strong, I know," she said at last, "but the stream will bear you away, while I stand on the bank and watch its flowing."

"I shall win though. Not because I am strong, but because any deviation from the norm has its price, and in the end that price is exacted to the uttermost."

"You threaten?" she asked, with a challenging note in the question.

"Say that I warn," he answered quietly, gravely. "You must pay."

"You know that, if I willed it, you would not leave this house?" she asked, after another lengthy silence.

"Then we should both be dead," he retorted grimly.

"No— Oh, no! Look out through the window, toward the bridge."

HE STOOD up to look. Light enough remained outside to reveal to his gaze the shapes of two great cats, tawny things that sat on their haunches, faced toward the house, just clear of the bridge parapets.

Then he blinked, for the two shapes dissolved to nothingness as he gazed at them, and he knew the effort of maintaining the vision she had imposed on his retinæ had been too much for her. The knowledge gave him intense satisfaction as he seated himself again.

"We are quite alone in this house," she said. "You can prove nothing to others, no matter what you see or hear, alone here with me."

"Admitted, but I have proof for myself, now," he told her.

She laughed, softly. "You needed none," she said, "as I knew the moment I first saw you. We are very old, you and I."

"Even if this be my ninth life, I know only one," he dissented.

"Nine lives, the ninth life—you harp on it!" she exclaimed with evident anger. "I too know only one. But we are very old."

"Leaving me out of it, I'd be interested

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to know exactly how you reach that conclusion," he said. "Especially since—well, as I see it, you are not likely to get much older."

"I should be very much interested to know how you reach that conclusion," she retorted with satiric amusement.

"You want that put plainly?" he demanded.

"We are quite alone here," she said. "You may say what you will."

"Plainly, then—the last night you spent in London, the body of a child—identified later by the caretaker at Gravenor Mansions as that of his son—was found on Wimbledon Common after midnight, mauled and clawed as if those two vanishing cats of yours had got at it."

"And I tell you"—she spoke with an earnest sincerity that he could not doubt—"I know nothing of the death of that child."

He sat puzzled, silenced for the time. He had been so sure, but truth sounded in her words: there is an intonation that compels belief, and it was hers then.

She turned her head a little, and the glow in the grate reflected from her eyes, rendering them as depths of visible, velvet darkness.

"Nothing," he echoed. It was an affirmation, not a question. "Yet I wonder—you know old magic. That trick of the cats was on a level with the rod that turned into a serpent—"

"That?" she broke in contemptuously. "I could fill this room so full of serpents that the hissing would drown your voice. It is no more than a child, if instructed, could summon out by his will."

"And you, with powers like those, aim to marry Tony Briggs!"

"Had I known that you are his friend, I would have chosen elsewhere," she retorted, with a trace of bitterness. "The friendship must end."

"Or the engagement," he retorted harshly. "Since you speak of it like that, why marry him? Obviously not for love."

"No," she said, after a long, long silence, "but because you were right in one thing you said. I have begun the ninth life."

"I begin to understand," he remarked, after another interminable interval. "Eight and thirty years ago, you began the eighth. That would make you—eight times thirty-eight, now—"

"Not so," she interposed. "I was sure the moment we met that you know much. But not all. How could you, not being initiate?"

"The night has hardly begun," he observed coolly, "and I never intended to reach London till tomorrow. Let me crave another hour, say, of your hospitality, and ask why it is—not so."

"Why should I tell you?" she demanded.

"Because you are afraid of me," he answered, and made of the sentence a statement of inescapable fact.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acid waste in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be over-worked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of poisonous waste.

When functional kidney disorder permits poisonous matter to remain in the blood, you won't feel well. This may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

If you have trouble with frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning, there may be something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)

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Bulldozer and me see that wild horse put up the scrap of the century

McGee on Horseback

By

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE
Author of "McGee & Co.: Troubleshooters," "Tin Money," etc.

Sourdoughs, place your bets! With a horse that looks like a long-haired moose and with a porcupine for a mascot, No-Shirt McGee is set to make racetrack history in the sweepstakes of Hungry Creek. A complete novelet of the North

I

BULLDOZER CRAIG takes a look into the meat cache and smiles all over. "Well, No-Shirt," he says, "we're settin' pretty. Look at that mountain sheep meat; the moose meat and the caribou steaks we've got in that cache. Now turn your head and take a gander at the woodpile. No matter what comes we'll be warm and have plenty to eat this winter. Let the blizzards blow, say I!"

"Well, I don't say any such thing," I tell him. "Mrs. McGee's boy No-Shirt hasn't spent the biggest part of his life in Alaska for nothin'. We've got enough for ourselves, but not enough for guests."

"Who's comin'?" he asks, curious.

"I don't know," I admit, "but when it gets noised around that Craig and McGee have got plenty of grub and a keg of hootch, we'll have visitors. The North's full of folks ready to trade their doubtful charms for a winter's grub."

"What's it got to do with me?" Bulldozer asks.

"You've got to take your musket, go into the hills and knock over a moose or two," I tell him. "And listen, don't kill 'em five miles from the cabin like you done the last time. Drive 'em in close, then shoot 'em. Always let your meat bring itself in on the hoof."

"I'll remember that," Bulldozer says. "And if I can't drive my bull to the cabin, I'll hang the meat up in trees and let our guests pack it in when they come."

"No, you can't do that," I answer. "The wolverines will get it."

"The wolverines will get the guests or the meat?" he asks.

"None of your smart cracks," I tell him.

Well, he fills his pockets full of ca'tridges, some dried caribou meat, a handful of prunes and a loaf of sourdough bread, and clears out. I don't see him for two days, then he comes in pop-eyed with excitement.

"Hey, No-Shirt," he yells, "I've just seen a herd of long-haired moose—couldn't get close enough to 'em for a shot. And, say, you should've seen 'em travel. Hey! What in the hell's the matter with you? Why're you lookin' at me in that tone of voice."

"You've been drinkin' wolverine milk again," I accuse him.

Now wolverine milk is a potent drink made by sourdoughs. The secret is handed down from father to son. Durin' a long, dry spell Bulldozer got hisself adopted by

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a childless sourdough and learned the secret of buildin' wolverine milk.

It ain't a drink that's brewed or distilled. It's built. You start with a empty keg, potato peelin's and prune juice and you go on from there.

"Honest, No-Shirt," Bulldozer insists, "I ain't had so much as a snort of wolverine milk. My head's clear as a bell. And I saw long-haired moose."

"I suppose the bulls had green moss on their horns, too?" I sneer.

"That's another funny thing about it," he says, "there ain't a bull in the lot—just cows."

"How many?" I ask.

"May be twenty or thirty," he answers. "I couldn't count 'em. The herd was movin' through the timber too fast."

Well, that is reasonable enough. The timber is kinda bad around here, but I'd never seen a couple of dozen cow moose runnin' together in one band.

"Can you find this band of long-haired moose?" I ask.

"Sure," he answers. "I've got to find 'em if I expect to winter with you."

"You'd better find 'em," I tell him, "or I'll have a jury of six lookin' you over and askin' funny questions." A jury of six men is always called to judge a man's sanity.

"I've heard that old wheeze about there bein' three sides to Alaska—Inside, Outside and Morningside—where they send the insane. But Morningside or not, I saw long-haired moose," he says.

WE SET off bright and early the followin' mornin' and that night we camp in the snow on the rim of a long, narrow valley. "The herd's down there," Bulldozer says. "May be we'll hear 'em."

I'm too tired to do anything more'n crawl into my sleepin' bag, but around midnight Bulldozer starts shakin' me. "Hear 'em," he yelps excitedly. "Listen to 'em go."

I can hear something pounding down the valley. Moose might have made a noise like that. But long-haired moose! I shake my head again. Then suddenly I hear a new sound—the cry of the wolf pack. The poundin' of hoofs gets louder. I can hear brush and small trees crackin', then a high-pitched scream followed by snarls.

"They got one of 'em down," Bulldozer says. "The rest've gone on."

"Listen, you sucklin' babe," I sneer, "did you ever hear of horses? They're animals with four corners and there's a leg on each corner. They have heads and tails, and men line 'em up, and make 'em race, and the man who puts his money on the nose of the winnin' horse gets his money back and a lot more with it."

"Tryin' to be funny, eh?" Bulldozer growls. "Whoever heard of a long-haired horse? And there ain't no horses in this part of the country anyway."

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"Maybe you're like my friend Murphy down in Seattle," I suggest. "Murphy had a knife-sharpenin' outfit, which he hauled around with an old horse named Chinese Cent because he wasn't worth much. One day Chinese Cent ran away, busted up the wagon on a fireplug and scattered knives and whetstones from hell to breakfast. Murphy made a report to the police and the desk man says, 'Hell, Murphy, it must've taken a lot to scare that old plug.' And Murphy says, 'It did. He got the fright of his life—he saw another horse!' "

"Meanin' I ain't seen horses before," Bulldozer growls. "Those ain't horses down there. They're long-haired moose."

We go back to sleep, but as soon as it's daylight we're up again. By the time the sun's up, we're through eatin'. We work along the ridge and pretty soon we spot a place where the snow's tramped down and crimson. There's a lot of hair and bones scattered about. We go down and I can see the bones are from a horse and wolf.

"That horse got a wolf," I tell Bulldozer, "before the pack got him."

"So it is a horse," he says, his voice full of doubt.

"Every stampede the North has ever known," I tell Bulldozer, "has brought in a bunch of horses and dogs. In the early days there was everything from lap dogs to Newfoundlands. Amongst the horses you found tough little slickears to thoroughbred racin' stock—nags that weren't good for the track any more and had been sold for what they'd bring. The stampede sent the price up and horse dealers bought 'em and shipped 'em North."

"Where they growed beards," Bulldozer sneers.

"Some of them would get away from pack-trains," I patiently explain, "or an owner would be killed and the whole train have to find range or die. With the cold makin' their hair grow, and nobody to clip it, I've seen horses with manes and tails draggin' in the brush.

"But don't take it to heart, Bulldozer. You ain't the first man who figgered he'd seen a long-haired moose. It's a natural mistake in a country where you expect to see moose instead of horses."

"It's a horse on me," Bulldozer says, "and that ain't no pun. I suppose the wolves got on the band's trail and chased it into our country."

"That's about the size of it," I answer. "And the wolves will hang onto the trail until they've killed the last nag. I'm for campin' in these parts and wipin' out the pack."

"A swell idear," Bulldozer agrees. "And what's the matter with gettin' ourselves a couple of pack-horses and packin' our meat in, as long as it can't be drove to the cabin on the hoof?"

"I'm all for it," I tell him. "Watchin' you catch a horse and break it to the pack-saddle is goin' to be better'n a three-ring circus."

II

NOT knowin' where we'd go, me and Bulldozer are packin' our outfits on our backs as we work along the rim of the valley. We make slower time with a load, but we know we won't have to back-track for our sleepin' bags and grub. Every little while we stop, rest and listen.

Us McGees never believe in doin' unnecessary work and I'm the family leader in that school of thought. My ears has saved me many a mile. In a few minutes my ears tell me we can keep a-settin' instead of crossin' a gulch that's arm-pit deep with snow. The band's comin' back down the valley again.

We hear the main bunch go crashin' through the brush on the opposite side. Then a lone critter—cut off from the rest of the band—is headin' our way.

The critter busts into the open a quarter-mile away a few seconds later. He ain't the biggest horse I've ever seen, but he's the homeliest. He's a kinda of a paint horse. If he was a dog you'd call him a alley mongrel. He's as brave as a lion, smarter'n a fox and meaner'n sin. I know horses, havin' once owned a medicine show and three or four runnin' horses.

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The wolves are a couple of hundred yards behind him, and comin' strong. He looks back, and I can see he ain't scared. He's just mad clean through. He's got his ears laid back and his ears are showin'. His tail—matted with burs and clay—is bouncin' in the snow behind him, and his mane is whippin' along like a sheet hung on a clothesline. The rest of his hair is long, too.

Just as the wolves close in, he suddenly turns and goes into deeper snow. "The damned fool," Bulldozer says. "Now they've got him."

"Oh no, they ain't," I says.

The snow's almost up to his belly which means his feet are still on the ground, and the wolves feet ain't. They're breakin' through to their bellies and can't move around fast. A couple get in behind to hamstring the horse, while those in front go for the throat.

They jump, but the snow gives way when they start the jump, and they fall short. As they hit, the horse rears up and drives his hoofs into the nearest wolf. Them front hoofs are plenty sharp. We can see the wolf almost break in the middle. He rolls over and crawls away, while the others keep at the horse.

We move closer and can see the plumes of vapor spurtin' through their white fangs, and we know from the gusty way the vapor comes out, they're breathin' hard.

One makes a long leap and opens a old wound on the horse's shoulder, then spills into the snow. The horse whirls, kicks out and lifts the wolf ten feet into the air. The uproar, with the stallion screamin' and the wolves snarlin', is enough to make a man's blood run cold.

"Let's give that boy a hand," Bulldozer says, his nerves crackin' under the strain.

I know how he feels. It's like a fight crowd yellin', "Stop the fight!" Only this horse is a long way from bein' groggy. Bulldozer's afraid they'll get him down.

"You take those on the right," I tell him, "and I'll open up on those on the left." Then we commences to blaze away.

We don't miss, because I've learned Bulldozer how to shoot straight in a country where you count your ca'tridges as just so many pounds of grub. Straight shootin' was one of the first things I learned on the trail forty years ago.

THE snow's covered with squirmin' wolves while the first shots are still echoin' amongst the peaks. We both put a bullet through the last wolf, then stop and watch that stallion go. Maybe the noise scared him worse'n the wolves did, because he wasn't really scared of the wolves. Maybe he'd been shot at before. I don't know, but I do know I've never seen horseflesh on the track or range go faster.

He uncorks a burst of speed that's nothin' less than greased lightnin'. "I wish he was on one of them California tracks," I yell, "and I had five thousand dollars right on the nose."

"He'd probably turn out to be a lead nickel," Bulldozer answers. "Maybe you've won a bet in your time, but I never did. I got desperate once and bet, even money, a hundred-to-one-shot horse would come in last and the damned thing finished out in front and my worst enemy had a hundred dollars ridin' on the nag's nose."

The homely little stallion clears a rock half covered with snow and vanishes into a thicket. Five minutes later my heart quits poundin' with excitement. "I've changed my mind about wantin' pack-horses," Bulldozer says. "It's less work and safer to pack our meat in on our own backs."

"Those nags look tough, eh?" I suggest.

"Tough. I've never seen a tougher bunch at a bulldozers' picnic," Bulldozer answers. "And mostly the lads who now drive bulldozers and tractors are the sons of the toughest of the old-time teamsters and mule skinners."

Now it happens Bulldozer Craig is one of the toughest men I've ever known, which will give you some idear how we both felt about that little stallion. We'd have one hell of a time trappin' that band and a worse time breakin' 'em in for work. Me and Bulldozer go down and skin the wolves.

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There's a bounty on their heads and their pelts are good for a fair-sized pack of bacon and beans at any tradin' post.

What with our foolin' around and takin' things easy, four days have passed and we're out of grub when we see our cabin again. There it is, on a little bench overlookin' a creek that's supposed to have gold-bearin' sand. And there's smoke comin' out of the chimney.

Bulldozer looks at me and says, "Visitors."

"Yeah," I answer, fearin' the worst, but tryin' to keep up my spirits, "maybe they ain't moochers. They might be trappers just goin' through the country. Or miners goin' down to the tradin' post for grub."

"If they're moochers, figgerin' to eat off'n us all winter long," Bulldozer says, "we'll put 'em to work capturin' Lead Nickel and his bunch."

"Why do you call that stallion Lead Nickel?" I ask, gettin' kinda mad, but not as mad as I'd get if I'd owned the horse. "Why don't you call him Buzzsaw or John L. Sullivan?"

"He may look like Man o' War to you, No-Shirt," Bulldozer answers, "but that homely hunk of wolf bait looks like a lead nickel to me."

I understand what's back of Bulldozer's feelin's. Usually he's generous, and admires the kind of courage that stallion's got. But he figgers the stallion tricked him into thinkin' he was a long-haired moose and nobody feels kindly toward things that make 'em look like a sucker.

We push our way through the snow to the cabin. Fifty yards from the door we stop dead in our tracks. Men—damned old lads with high-pitched voices—are singing *Sweet Adeline,* and the bass is havin' a tough time droppin' down to the low notes. "They've found your wolverine milk, Bulldozer," I tell him.

"Let's go in and save the keg," he snarls, "at least I can smell the air inside."

I'm sympathetic as possible.

"You won't need to sniff at the inside of the keg to get the familiar odor," I tell him. "The cabin will be full of it."

AS SOON as we open the door I'm all for puttin' out the fire to keep from havin' a explosion. The air reeks with alcohol. Standin' in the middle of the room, with their arms across each other's shoulders and their heads close together as they try to harmonize, is three fellows with so much hair they look like Santa Claus and a fourth who ain't got a spear of hair from his neck up.

I know 'em—Mike and Ike Hardy, eighty-year-old twins; Solo Sandburn, and Billiard Ball Casler. They was good men in their day—forty years ago. None of 'em had ever kicked a dog or refused a drink, which is a fair test in any man's country.

But they'd never struck it rich. Each winter they moved in on some unfortunate devil. Their intentions was good. They didn't intend to mooch. With the faith of miners who're sure they're goin' to strike it rich next season, they figgered the grub they et was just borrowed.

They broke off their song and shook hands with me and Bulldozer. As usual, Billiard Ball Casler done the talkin'. "I was comin' out of the Beaver Creek country," he explains, "and I saw smoke and went over there and found Solo Sandburn. We figgered we'd come out together. On the way out we meet up with the Hardy boys. I guess we ain't as young as we used to be. Seems like we petered out when we saw your cabin. The Hardy boys was limpin'."

"Both in the same leg," I suggests, knowin' they usually caught colds the same time.

"Yep," Ike pipes. "The left leg. Knee keeps slippin' off'n the joint."

"Make yourselves to home," I says. "Plenty of grub in the cache."

"So we noticed," Casler says. "We'll throw in our grub. As soon as we can make the grade we'll go out and get some meat. And when we get in shape we'll pull our freight."

"You don't need to do that," I say.

"Nope," Bulldozer insists, "we'll be sore if you even think about goin' on. Me and No-Shirt are sick of lookin' at each other.

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Another week and we'd have cabin fever."

Them four old boys relax right before our eyes. That afternoon we add two bunks, makin' six, then me and Bulldozer go into executive session. It's plain there ain't grub enough for all of us. And it's equally plain if them four oldtimers try to push on to town they'll get caught in a cold snap and die.

"Why don't they go to the Pioneer's home at Sitka," Bulldozer complains. "They treat 'em swell down there—warm rooms, good food, and others who talk their language."

"When you're that old," I tell him, "you'll savvy. They come from a breed that's always taken care of itself. Them four lads don't want to be nursed along. They want to keep right along prospectin'. They want to strike it rich and see the world."

"Oh, I ain't kickin'," Bulldozer answers, "but for their own good it seems to me—"

"Do you know what I'd do if I had the money," I interrupt.

"I suppose you'd build the McGee Miners' Home," Bulldozer answers, "and stock it with old timers. You'd have a creek runnin' past the door so they could prospect and you'd salt the creek with gold so they could strike it."

"You ain't quite hit it," I says, "but almost. I'd build up a McGee Grubstake Fund of twenty thousand dollars or so. Any oldtimer who needed a grubstake could have it for the askin'. Now every sourdough has got his pet creek he'd like to pan. He's sure if he had a chance he'd strike gold there. I'd send 'em to their pet creeks."

"You'd prob'bly have a thousand applications the first year," Bulldozer says, "and figgerin' each outfit to cost around five hundreds dollars that means the fund would be exhausted by the first forty men."

"Suppose one of 'em made a big strike," I argue, "the fund would get half. That's the grubstake law. And if several of 'em hit it why—"

"Keep your shirt on, No-Shirt," he advised. "First thing you know you'll be talkin' about buyin' an addin' machine to keep track of the fund." He's thoughtful for awhile, then says, "Well, what're we goin' to do next?"

"Bring in a lot of meat," I answer. "It looks as if we'd have to trap them wild horses after all."

"If we don't we'll have to use our own backs," he says. "Them four lads ain't skookum enough to pack in loads through deep snow. Damn it, I wish I had a good tractor, I'd bring in a year's supply in one trip."

III

ME AND Bulldozer spend the next two days makin' ropes out of raw moosehide. The oldtimers ask a lot of questions and help us with the ropes, but we admit exactly nothin'. In fact I don't admit to Bulldozer what's goin' on in the back of my mind because I'm afraid he'll overpower me and hold me for a jury of six. It's a fool idear, but like lots of fool idears a man can make or lose a lot of money backin' it.

But the more I think of it, the more it looks to me like the motion picture people and others in California might contribute twenty grand or so to the McGee Grubstake Fund for Tottering Sourdoughs.

The two of us head for the horses on the first promisin' day, but before we leave, Bulldozer hides his cask of wolverine milk. We make fair time, considerin' we're draggin' moosehide ropes and what not on a handsled. It takes us two days to make it to the valley and that night around the campfire, Bulldozer says, "Well, out with it."

"Out with what?" I ask, lookin' guilty.

"What you've been thinkin' about the past two days," he answers. "You've been sniffin' the smoke of battle. I can read signs when I see 'em. Maybe you've got an idear you'll enter Lead Nickel in that hundred thousand dollar horserace at Santa Anita and cop the dough."

"I ain't no such fool as that," I answer. "But there's some five and ten thousand

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dollar races he might win. Then if I bet an ounce or two of dust on his nose and long odds—"

"You're crazier'n a loon," he snorts. "Besides, what makes you think there'll be long odds?"

"One look at him," I answer, "and the smart boys will put him down as a long shot, then cover every dollar that's bet on him, figgerin' it's sucker money."

"And that's just what it will be," Bulldozer predicts. "Sucker money. Count me out."

"What you doin'?" I ask, "lettin' me down?"

"I'm with you to the finish when it comes to catchin' that long-haired moose and trainin' him to run," he answers, "but I ain't puttin' any of my money on Lead Nickel's nose. Now listen to your Uncle Dudley," he continues, gettin' serious. "We made a little money out of a tin mine."

"Right," I says, goin' modern in my slang.

"And another hunk of money buildin' a jetty," he adds.

"Right," I echo.

"And everybody knows it," he continues, "and the money wolves has tried to work all kinds of gags to get hold of it, and you've been too smart for 'em. But, No-Shirt, if you go down to Hollywood with a horse, you're sunk. If you ain't touted out of your roll you'll be tricked out of it."

"And what'll you do?" I ask him.

"Buy you a square feed and give you a new start in life," he answers promptly. "You give me my start, didn't you?"

It ain't more'n I'd expect of the big tramp, but I liked to hear him say it.

THE next mornin' we put on snowshoes and work along the ridges hopin' to find the band. It's spittin' snow and there's a raw wind blowin' which makes the goin' mighty tough. Around noon Bulldozer sends up a smoke signal and I know he's found the band's trail.

I make my way to the fire and he's got some hot tea ready. It looks to him like we're in for a storm and that the horses know it. They've all gone up a gulch that'll shelter 'em. We follow the trail a half mile, then hear 'em millin' amongst the low trees and brush.

We climb a ridge and work along, keepin' downwind from 'em until we can see that paint stallion. He's tougher and uglier'n I figgered he was. We're close enough to see his scars and he's got plenty of 'em.

"It's plain to see he's the head man hereabouts," Bulldozer says. "But he'll never get to the big California tracks, No-Shirt. It'd been too much like a man livin' on the wrong side of the railroad tracks tryin' to crash the four hundred."

"He's a lot of horse for his weight," I says after sizin' up the things that count. "A throwback, like as not, to some thoroughbred that got lost on the trail."

A dozen plans are runnin' through my mind on the little matter of trappin' the horse. If the trees was bigger we could drop 'em across the gulch and stop the band from escapin'. Even then we'd be a long ways from puttin' moose meat on his back. I'm thinkin' about another fool plan when Bulldozer breaks the silence.

"Why not walk out of that cabin and tell them oldtimers everything's theirs? That'll save all this meat huntin' business."

"It'd hurt their feelin's," I tell him. "They'd feel that they'd run us out of our own home. Besides the more I look at that paint horse the bigger my ambitions get. I come here thinkin' Lead Nickel might go to the California tracks. Now I know he's goin' there."

"You're askin' for it," Bulldozer groans, "and when a man's your age he's a stubborn old goat. Argument runs off his back like it does off'n a duck's feathers."

The storm hits that night. We can hear trees breakin' off now and then, but we're sheltered from everything except noise as long as we stay below the rim of the gulch. I stick my head out and when the fine snow hits it I think somebody's cut loose with a charge of rock salt from a ten gauge shotgun.

I'm just dozin' off when Bulldozer

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shakes me. "Now's the time to get a rope on that Lead Nickel," he says. "We can sneak up on him. The snow's pretty deep down there and he can't move so fast. If we wait until daylight he's liable to spot us."

My first thought is to argue the point. Then I decide if Bulldozer is in a mood to tackle the job, I'd better cheer him on. "All right," I answer, "when shall we start?"

"Right now," he says.

It takes us about five minutes to get out of the sleepin' bags and pull on snowshoes. There's plenty of noise to muffle our movements, but there's always the chance a shift in the wind might carry our scent, or one of the nags will spot us. Bulldozer gives me a long rope and takes one hisself.

"We'll get two ropes on him," he says, "then go in opposite directions and snub the ropes on trees. We'll hold him so he can't get at either of us."

"Then what?"

"He'll calm down, then we'll decide what to do," Bulldozer explains. "Come along," he adds, leadin' the way.

WE TAKE plenty of time. The fresh snow muffles all sound and we're into the band before we know it. They're standin' around, with their heads down and their backs blanketed with snow. They act like they expect days to pass before the storm ends. It was sure a lesson in patience to see 'em.

The stallion suddenly lifts his head and looks around. For a minute I think maybe they're goin' to stampede; then he relaxes again. Bulldozer gets within ten feet of his head, then he gets the rope ready. A bush keeps the horse from seein' him. And when Bulldozer gets up, he does it so slow that he's standin' there as still as a tree. He's covered with snow, too, and that helps.

Suddenly that rope flashes and settles around the stallion's neck. Then all hell breaks loose. Two horses go past me so fast they're a blur. The stallion whirls and makes a plunge for safety. I see the bottoms of a pair of snowshoes that are leavin' me like twin comets. They're Bulldozer's snowshoes and they're still on him.

He hits the snow, almost disappears, then goes down the gulch like a toboggan. The snowshoes come off and his big feet leave a pair of furrows in the snow. "Get a rope on him," he bellows, his voice partly muffled by snow, "and—snub it."

Get a rope? Hell! I can't even keep up with the stallion. Besides, I'm havin' my hands full dodgin'. A couple of horses that tried to climb straight up a wall has tumbled back and the others are millin' around 'em. I climb the bank and run along the ridge. The snow's almost blowed off, and I'm in moccasins so I can make pretty good time. Sooner or later the stallion's going to flounder in a drift and I want to be on the job when it happens.

I spot a drift and run down to it, and as he tries to fight through I drop my rope around his neck and snub it to the nearest tree. Now we've got him. That is, we've almost got him. He tramps the snow down and gets ready to strike with his front feet and kick with the rear.

Bulldozer's all in, and one hand's bleedin' from a rope burn. "Damn his hide," he snarls, "he knowed what he was doin' when he drug me through them boulders. Tomorrow I'll be black and blue from head to foot."

I fix up his hand and we settle down to wait for more light. That stallion is a mighty stirrin' sight. His teeth are bared and his head's held high. He's sure breathin' defiance to the world.

The snow lets up a hour after sunrise, but the sun don't break through the clouds so there's no danger of us goin' snow blind while we're gettin' the stallion to the cabin. The other horses are stampedin' around, still scared over the night's doin's and that starts a bull moose movin'. Bulldozer drops the bull a half mile from the stallion and goes down and dresses him out. I try my wiles on Lead Nickel, but I don't have any better luck than when I try said wiles on the wimmin. Like the wimmin, he's got it figgered my intentions ain't the best

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I can't get within a mile of the brute. He don't show no fear. He don't know the meanin' of the word. He's just mad clean through.

Bulldozer comes back and says, "I've butchered that moose. Why ain't you got the horse ready to haul it in?"

"You know damned well why I ain't," I answer. "Suppose you help me get on his back."

"You ain't goin' to ride him?" he yells.

"You don't bust horses by readin' 'em poetry," I answer.

"You're loony," he growls. "But let's get it over with."

I MIGHT tell you about the kick Bulldozer got in the stomach; the hunk Lead Nickel bit out of my arm; and the long hours it took to get a make-shift bridle over his head. But I won't. Fin'ly everything was ready and I got on his back. I had a rope around his middle and a good hand hold, but no saddle or stirrups. Very gently Bulldozer un-snubs the ropes from the trees, takes one off'n the stallion's neck and coils up the other, which he hands to me.

"It'd be safer if you had a anchor on the end of that rope," Bulldozer says. "Then you could drop it and moor the cuss when he drops his pilot. Me bein' the pilot."

"Yank off that blindfold," I tell him. "Then get a dustpan and broom and sweep up the pieces."

Off comes the blindfold, but Lead Nickel don't do nothin'. He looks over his shoulder to see what's on his back, and when he sees, he sneers. And I can tell by his eyes he's thinkin', "This is going to be good."

"He's quittin' cold," Bulldozer yells. "You've got the Indian sign on him."

"He ain't got nothin' on me, not even hisself," Lead Nickel tells himself. Then he steps slowly down the gulch. I think he's lookin' for a hard place to dump me. The gulch widens out into a windswept flat, froze solid, and studded with rough stones. Then the stallion stops.

He leaps into the air and comes down stiff-legged. It seems like I'm goin' to be split in half and fall on both sides of him, but I hang together. My heart settles a inch and a kidney slips a moorin'. Up he goes and down he comes. Spots float before my eyes, and I feel sick. I don't have time to think how sick because he's in the air again. He twists and I come down off center. I'm hangin' onto the rope with both hands and manage to stay on.

He looks around like to say, "How'd you like some more of them apples?" Then he gives 'em to me.

"You fool," Bulldozer yells, "he's breakin' you into bits. Your face is green. Unload!"

Down he comes again, and I must've kinda passed out for a second. The next thing I know I'm hangin' on by sheer instinct and he's racin' for a tree. I duck, but the limb scrapes a furrow in my back. I look up and he's headin' for another limb, a little lower. He ducks his head, but I yank it up. My timin' is perfect. He gets a bang that staggers him and some of the fight oozes out. I make the most of it, makin' him gallop, at the same time diggin' my heels into his flanks.

He's breathin' hard when I turn him back towards the flat, but I don't give him no rest. We circle wide and end up with three miles behind us.

"He's licked for today," I tell Bulldozer.

"And so're you," Bulldozer says. He watches the nag's front feet and grabs him by the head. I slide off and that ain't all I do. I pass out completely.

Pretty soon I wake up hearin' a familiar voice sayin', "Who's loony now?" It's mine.

"I didn't think you could do it, No-Shirt," Bulldozer says. "It's a wonder you ain't dead. You bled from the mouth and nose after you passed out."

"I busted a lot of 'em in my younger days," I tell him, "and it looks as if I had one more good ride in me."

I ain't much help, because your uncle No-Shirt is a pretty sick man. We don't want to give the stallion time to think about fightin' some more, so Bulldozer gets

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busy with the ax and ropes and rigs up a couple of long shafts on which he builds a platform. One end of the shafts are hooked onto a collar; the other ends drag in the snow. Bulldozer loads me onto the platform and drives down to the moose. We load on five hundred pounds of meat and head for the cabin.

IV

AS SOON as we arrive at the cabin we put the oldtimers to work buildin' a barn out of light trees. After that we tell 'em they've got to rustle feed for the horse.

"What're you goin' to do with him?" Billiard Ball Casler asks. "You can't keep him for a pet. He nipped a piece out of my stern when I bent down to pick up a stick. A man can't trust hisself with such a critter, unless you work him to death."

"We're takin' him down to California," I tell 'em, "in the hope of pickin' up some smart money. If we do, we'll grubstake each one of you boys. This comin' winter you can have the cabin to yourselves."

"Sure we ain't runnin' you out?" Casler asks suspiciously.

"Nope," I lie. "Me and Bulldozer have been lookin' for a excuse to go to California and now we've got it. As soon as the ice on the river gets thick enough to travel, we'll pull our freight."

We can see the oldtimers are tickled pink. They'd evidently talked it over amongst theirselves and figgered six was a crowd and they'd better go on to town.

As soon as me and Bulldozer got rested up, we exercised the stallion. We did our best to get on the good side of him, but he wouldn't go for us. He seemed to remember we'd caught and brought him there. He didn't lose none of his spirit, but he stopped kickin' and bitin' us whenever we got around him.

At the end of the second week me and Bulldozer commenced to worry. Somethin' was wrong with the stallion. "He mopes around like a homesick kid," Bulldozer says. "You'd think he'd never been away from his folks before."

"He hasn't," I answer. "You don't suppose a hardboiled cuss like Lead Nickel can be homesick, do you?"

"Somethin's wrong with him," Bulldozer answers. "Say, I read once that race horses have mascots—something to live with 'em, and sleep in their stall, like a dog, cat or rooster. I believe that poor so-and-so is lonesome. What we need is a mascot for him."

That night we introduces him to a Malemute dog. The dog figgers he was some kind of a moose and tries to hamstring him and Lead Nickel kicks the dog through the roof. And that's that.

The next week he gets worse, and Bulldozer goes down to the river and cuts a hole in the ice to see if it's thick enough for travel. It ain't. I'm thinkin' maybe I'd better turn the horse loose before he dies on us, when suddenly he's contented.

We watch the dogs, figgerin' one had made up to him. But they hadn't. "Maybe one of the Hardy twins is sleepin' in his manger," Bulldozer suggests.

"That ain't funny," I answer. "Lead Nickel is the kind of a horse that makes the best of things. He's fought it all out with hisself and won a victory."

Bulldozer ain't convinced. He thinks maybe ptarmigan or grouse are roostin' in the stable. I hope they ain't because that'd mean we'd have to take 'em along. It's better to have no mascot at all than to take away one a horse likes.

EARLY in the fourth week I go into the barn to feed Lead Nickel and I hear him nickerin' like he was talkin' to his best friend. He ain't hungry and greetin' me. It's somethin' else.

"I've got it," I yelps in triumph, "there's a pack-rat down in that straw." I haul off and give the straw a kick, so the rat will scamper out and—

Did you ever grab hold of a live wire and feel an electric shock go up your arm? Or better still, did you ever back into a cactus? It felt to me like I'd kicked a cactus charged with electricity. I howled like a moon-struck Malemute, and grabbed

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my foot. Then I yelled some more and wondered what had stabbed my hand.

Bulldozer comes rushin' in. "What's wrong, No-Shirt?" he yells. "Somebody murderin' you in cold blood?"

"Take a stick," I answer, "and uncover what's in that hay."

"Stick hell," he sneers. "What're feet for?" And before I can stop him, he kicks up the hay. Something goes swish and he howls like a stretcher case. I catch a glimpse of a porcupine's tail.

"Porcupine!" I yell.

"I'll kill the blasted thing," Bulldozer bellers. He catches up a club, but I grab his arm.

"You can't kill it," I argue. "He's Lead Nickel's mascot. He's the reason the horse has suddenly got contented."

"You blitherin' idiot," Bulldozer fumes, "who ever heard of a porcupine mascot? How're we goin' to pack him around with us from race meet to race meet? If you think I'm goin' to spend this winter and spring jabbed by an animated cactus you're crazy."

"Keep your shirt on, Bulldozer," I admonish. "This will come out all right."

"Yeah, but them porcupine quills won't come out all right—they'll work out," he grumbles. He gazes at the porcupine which is movin' into the stallion's manger. I suppose the salt we'd gave the horse attracts it. Lead Nickel lowers his head and nickers. I suppose he's seen 'em on the range plenty of times, and they take away the homesick feelin'. They're somethin' he's used to.

The Hardy twins help us into the cabin and then set to work pullin' out the quills—that is, them that don't break off in our hides.

Bulldozer don't say much that night. The idear of takin' a wild horse and porcupine over a frozen Alaska river don't look good to him. He's broodin'. The future looks dark. Well, I can't say I'm any too chipper myself. But when us McGees make up our minds to do somethin', we go through with it, even if it's the wrong thing.

Animals are funny. Smart, too. In no time that porcupine knows nobody's goin' to bother him. He comes into the cabin and eats away at the ax handle, and any wood that's salt from bein' touched by sweaty hands. We're always havin' to watch our step to keep from gettin' stuck.

One of the twins names him Cactus Pete. I suppose we could've found a better name, but me and Bulldozer are too discouraged to think one up. Our quill wounds are hurtin'.

WHEN the ice gets thick enough our wounds have healed and we've made a harness for Lead Nickel and a sled for our outfit. On the sled is a box for Cactus Pete. Bulldozer's made a pair of tongs for handlin' him.

Just as we're about to leave the cabin, Billiard Ball Casler comes up. "No-Shirt," he says, "you said suthin' or other about grubstakin' a lot of us old ruins if Lead Nickel won a wad of prize money. That's a fine idear, and you're goin' to make a lot of old buzzards happy, because they can pan the sands of the crick they dreamt about before they die.

"We've scraped up some dust between us—a hundred dollars' worth. We'd like you to bet it on Lead Nickel's nose sometime when the odds are again' him."

With that he gives me a little poke. In the bottom is gold, mixed with tobacco crumbs and the heads of a couple of matches that had busted off when they scratched 'em.

"Sure, it goes right on the nose," I promise. We shake hands all around, then start.

Bulldozer is the picture of health, but I can see he fears the worst. "I got a hunch we're takin' a trail leadin' to financial disaster," he moans. "Racin' down in the states ain't our game. Our game's Alaska. But I'll see it through."

"I'm a fatalist, Bulldozer," I answer. "Fate will head us off if it ain't meant we should go Outside."

"Sure, we'll prob'ly fall through a overflow in the river ice and drown," he growls.

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It takes us a week to reach tidewater and we no more'n stop when half the town comes out and looks us over. "What do you want for that horse?" a miner says. "Give you a hundred dollars."

"Give you two!" yells another.

"Let's cut out this penny-ante biddin'," yells a third. "Here's five hundred dollars, No-Shirt. I'll lead the horse away, and no questions asked about where you got him."

"We're takin' him Outside," Bulldozer says, "and figger to clean up on the wise money boys at the big tracks. He ain't for sale at any price."

"Where'd you get him?" several yell.

I kick Bulldozer's shin and he swears, but keeps his mouth shut. We tie Lead Nickel in a sheltered place and go to a log hotel.

"What did you kick me on the shins for," Bulldozer snarls. "Tryin' to start somethin'? Any time you think you're good enough to choose me, No-Shirt, I'm ready."

"Shut up," I warn. "There's a stampede brewin'. I can smell it. The location of the new gold strike isn't generally known yet, but everybody's gettin' ready for it. When it's known everybody will be off. That's why they wanted to buy Lead Nickel."

"Oh boy! Oh boy! Oh boy!" Bulldozer whispers gleefully, "and we know where there's a band of wild nags."

"The trip Outside is all off," I tell him. "We're horse dealers."

"But if we turn around and head back," Bulldozer argues, "they'll smell a rat. They'll wonder what made us change our minds, and some smart cuss will figger we're after more horses. Enough will trail us to upset our plans."

"I'll have to figger a way to beat that," I answer.

EARLY the followin' mornin' there's a newspaper man knockin' at the door. He wants to buy me a feed, and when a newspaper man wants to buy a man a meal he's lookin' for a story, or else it is his day off and he wants to howl a little.

He's heard I've found a throwback horse that'll raise hell with the thoroughbreds on the big tracks Outside, and he wants to know what it's all about. Before we can go down to eat, Bulldozer gives him a snort of wolverine milk on an empty stomach and takes one himself. An hour later the two of 'em are tryin' to take the buildin' apart.

The marshal comes on the dead run. He's an old friend. "No-Shirt," he says, "if you don't calm down that Cheechako newspaper man and Bulldozer I'll have to put 'em in the skookum house."

I bet Bulldozer he can't tear a deck of cards in two with his bare hands, then I tell the reporter he can't tear a half deck in half. An hour later I look in. They're both dead to the world, and there're cards all over the floor. But I haven't lost any bets.

That afternoon I look up Petty, an old-timer. "What do you want to be a red herring to be drug across a trail?" I ask.

Petty's dead broke. "A grubstake," he answers.

"I'll give you one," I offer, "for a short trip. You're to tear out of her three o'clock tomorrow morning. Pretend you're tryin' to make a sneak of it. They'll think you've got the lowdown on this new strike, and follow."

"And you'll hit the trail for the real thing," Petty sneers. "No dice, No-Shirt."

"I give you my word that I'm not goin' on any gold stampede while your back is turned," I tell him. "Us McGees are men of our word. Or ain't we?"

"You are," he answers. "It is a deal."

There's a strange silence in camp the next mornin'. I go down and the hotel keeper says, "No-Shirt, you were asleep at the switch. There's been stampede in the air for days. Nobody knew just where it was, but Old Man Petty got a tip from somebody. He tried to sneak out last night, but somebody saw him. Now the stampede is on."

Me and Bulldozer hit the trail for the wild horses that afternoon. Nobody follows us. As soon as we show up at the cabin, Billiard Ball Casler smells a rat. "We thought we'd pick up a couple more

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horses," I tell him, "and maybe develop 'em into runnin' nags."

He looks me right in the eye. "I wasn't borned yesterday, No-Shirt," he says. "You figger to sell a bunch of them hayburners right here in Alaska. Where's the stampede?"

"If I knew, I'd be on it," I answer. "Now, listen, you old ruin. Even if there is a stampede, it'll be a winter one. And you're too old."

"Sourdoughs a hundred years old have gone on winter stampedes," he hotly declared. "And they've struck it, too."

I changed the subject. The next mornin' me and Bulldozer go up to the valley where them wild horses are hangin' out. It ain't so hard runnin' 'em down now. Lead Nickel's got it on most of 'em. I do the ropin' and Bulldozer does the bustin'. There ain't no foolin' on his part. He rides 'em rough until they calm down; then he goes on to the next one.

There's one stallion, a sleepy-lookin' bay that Lead Nickel can't catch. The first time I think it's a accident. The next time I put it down as plain hard luck, but when we chase him the third time and he gets away I know he's plenty fast. As I figger it, he's developed speed because Lead Nickel used to chase him away from the rest of the band on account of not wantin' a rival around.

With Bulldozer's help on another horse, we fin'ly run the bay down. He's a couple of handsful when it comes to kickin' and bitin'. Bulldozer busts him, but only after he's been tossed into the brush a couple of times.

It ain't the easiest thing in the world but we finally herd the nags down to our cabin. Billiard Ball Casler and the others have gone. It ain't no mystery, either. They've smelled stampede and have hit the trail, takin' most of our grub with 'em.

V

THREE weeks from the day we leave tidewater, we're back again. The boys have learned to their sorrow it was a waste of time to follow Old Man Petty. They're all back, ready for the real thing. And that ain't all. Three steamers are unloadin' stampeders from the Outside. Great heaps of freight are piled up on the beach and Cheechakos are millin' around tryin' to find gold in the town creek. It makes me think of the old days.

A cuss comes around, looks over our horses, and when he squats down with his back again' a stump and starts whittlin' I know he's an oldtime horse trader. "You've got twenty-five nags there," he says, "I'll give you twenty-five hundred dollars spot cash for the bunch, includin' the one you call Lead Nickel, and the sleepy-lookin' bay."

"Who wouldn't?" Bulldozer roars, wantin' to hit him.

"Keep your shirt on, Bulldozer," I warn, "this here's a gent of the old horse-tradin' school. Brother," I says to the horse trader, "I'm goin' to spoil your day by refusin' to dicker. First, we're keepin' Lead Nickel, the bay and three others. We're goin' on this stampede ourselves. You can have the twenty for two hundred dollars apiece. That's dirt cheap."

He starts to roar and beat his breast, so me and Bulldozer walk away and put up a sign sayin', *Pack Horses For Sale.* That turns the trick. The trader comes over and peels off four thousand dollars. He'll double his money inside a week and he knows it. I cache the money in The McGee Grubstake Fund For Totterin' Sourdoughs. Then I ask Old Man Petty where the real stampede is.

"It's on Hungry Creek," he answers.

"Hell," I snort, "that's a long ways from here, and it's hungry ground. There was a stampede there years ago."

"Somebody found the bedrock that the miners struck on the first stampede," Petty answered, "is a false one. There's real pay under it. Only a few have got the lowdown, so the sooner you hightail it out of here, the better."

Me and Bulldozer were gettin' our outfit together when another steamer drops anchor in the bay. Fifteen minutes after it

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arrives Bellowing Bill Staley lands on the beach. He was an early-day newsboy in the gold camps. As usual he's loaded with the latest Seattle papers.

He's yellin', "All about it!" when he spots me. "All about No-Shirt McGee, the millionaire turfman," he adds.

"Hey, you tramp," I growl, "what you talkin' about?"

"Buy a paper and find out," he answers.

So I buy one, and sure enough the cuss who sends news out of the camp has wrote a yarn about Lead Nickel. He sure laid it on about the horse's speed and the wealth me and Bulldozer had wrested from the bosom of the frozen North. It concluded by sayin' we'd take the horse Outside and win the Kentucky Derby only we figgered to make more on this new stampede.

A rat-faced kid had come ashore in the same boat with Bellowing Bill and Bulldozer nudges me and says, "That's the first time I ever saw a rat that looked like the McGee tribe. Haw! Haw! Haw."

I'm about to work him over when the kid comes up. "I just heard you called No-Shirt McGee," he says, "I'm your cousin Horace's son."

"Come on over to the tent," I says. I didn't want anybody to see him. Everybody has relatives and us McGees are no exception. It takes only one rotten apple to spoil a barrel. And while maybe Horace's offspring ain't rotten, at least I can see signs of dark spots.

UP HERE in the early days, Horace was called Moocher McGee, and you won't get no headache tryin' to figger out the reason. Besides always moochin' for the price of a meal or a drink, he was thoughtless in other ways. And it would be just like him to get married and bring a duplicate of hisself into the world.

I remember I saved him from bein' lynched once. He'd been caught robbin' a cache durin' a stampede. So this was his brat.

"What's your name, cousin?" I ask as soon as I've got him in the tent.

"Horace Junior," he answers. "And the Old Man said you are swell. Said you saved his life once—pulled him out of White Horse rapids."

You don't knock a father to his son, so I let him think it was the river and not a mob I saved his father from. "How'd you find me?" I ask.

"Read in the paper you had a fast horse," he answers. "The Old Man says, 'Son, you're just the man Cousin No-Shirt needs!' So I stowed away in the cargo and here I am, none the worse for washin' dishes all the way to Alaska. I'm a jockey. You need one. Am I hired?"

"Nope," I answer. "You don't need a jockey on a stampede. You need skookum men to handle horses, packs, break trail and shovel dirt."

He looks pretty sad. "The Old Man said, 'Blood's thicker'n water and No-Shirt never failed a McGee yet,'" he says.

"I got no need of a jockey," I tell him. "But I'll stake you to a feed and good clothes—trail clothes."

"I got a way with horses," he argues. "Why don't you let me look this Lead Nickel over? If he's good, we'll take him Outside and clean up at the big tracks."

"Nope," I growl. Then I take him over to the tradin' post and get him outfitted.

When I come out, Bellowin' Bill Staley is waitin' for me. "No-Shirt, you'll prob'bly knock my block off for sayin' this, but if you've got a horse don't let Cousin Horace hang around it. He's got a way with horses. They like him. The owner fires him, then he can't do anything with the horse, so they have to hire him back again. That ain't all. He ain't got no standin' with the big-time owners Outside."

"Crooked ridin', eh?" I suggest, "and the stewards sent him down?"

"He's smart," Bellowin' Bill explains. "They ain't ever been able to catch him yet. Now you're warned."

I thank him, then I continue to get ready for the stampede. The first thing I know Cousin Horace is foolin' round our five horses. Lead Nickel nickers every time he sees him. The sleepy bay horse playfully nips his arm, and the others get all het up.

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He's sure got a way with him. Even Cactus Pete thinks he's a swell cuss.

"Now Horace," I say, "you've got to clear out and get yourself a job. We're leavin' tomorrow mornin'."

He looks pretty sad. "I've a hunch I'm the difference between success and failure to you," he says.

"Cousin Horace," I answer patiently. "I agree. If we take you along we'll have grief. It seems like it ain't meant for McGees to travel in pairs."

Well, he was dead right, but I didn't realize it at the time. The first faint suggestion was when we start to pack the horses. They raise hell. Horace goes amongst them, and they're meek as kittens. Then we try and leave Cactus Pete behind. Nobody ever packs a porcupine on a stampede. There's more hell to pay. Lead Nickel—the horse I figger to ride—won't budge an inch. So we put Pete in a box and lash him onto the back of the horse ahead.

When we get goin', Horace comes along, too. The spirits of me and Bulldozer are so low by that time we ain't got the heart to protest.

"I guess you're hired," I tell him. "But remember, you're workin' for wages. You ain't a pardner."

"I knew you wouldn't turn a McGee down," he says.

WE'RE amongst the first to arrive on Hungry Creek, but who do you think we overtook on the way? Right. Billiard Ball Casler and his ancient pardners. They're pluggin' along with a team of moth-eaten dogs. I give 'em back the money they'd give me to bet on Lead Nickel's nose, then kept goin'.

Me and Bulldozer stake our ground, then we show Cousin Horace where to stake a claim. He's tickled to death. "I'll never forget this," he says, "even if I don't take a ounce of gold from it."

Me and Bulldozer move into one of the best cabins left by the former stampeders. It's a log buildin', set up on high ground and it's in good shape. A former packer owned it, and there's a log barn in back, and plenty of grass growin' in a clearin' nearby.

A week or so after the miners had hit Hungry Creek, the gamblers, sure-thing lads and the dancehall girls arrive. After the girls comes a couple of birds on good horses. They're Cheechako horses brought up from Outside. The boys are ridin' the two best nags and packin' their equipment on three others.

They look over the creek, can't find any good ground, so they buy a claim. One of 'em is the tall, dark and handsome type. The girls who dance and sell drinks on a percentage basis are willin' to dance with him for nothin'. He's got 'em all dizzy, but he pays well. His name is Dravus. The other fellow is smallish and blond. He's so nervous he makes me think of a June-bug. His name is Hawkins.

On Sundays Hawkins comes out in his glad rags—yellow shoes, purple pants and coat, yellow shirt and red necktie. He looks like a Filipino cannery hand headed for a white girls' dancehall.

There's a flat back of the camp and the first thing we know Hawkins and Dravus are runnin' races with their horses. They make a trail that's about a mile long, then call it a day. The miners commence to get what the smart boys call "horserace conscious."

This runnin' goes on for a couple of Sundays. Then Dravus gets a crowd together and says, "We're all working too hard, boys. We need a little recreation. True, there are plenty of lovely girls for us to dance with, but we need something competitive. Why not have some horse races? We'll find out how fast the best of the lot can go, put the slow ones ahead and race for prizes. I'm not in the money yet, but I'll put up a hundred dollars for a race next Sunday. Winner to take the money."

He gets a cheer for that. When Sunday rolls around, the best horses in the country are gallopin' around the track. That is, except Dravus' two, and McGee's Lead Nickel and the bay.

Bets are made, but Dravus and Hawkins don't take any part. "We haven't struck

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it yet," they explained. "When we're in the money we'll give our luck a run."

The first mail comes in after the camp had been goin' a month. Everybody knocked off. They was tired of thawin' ground with fire. They was losin' interest in the races, too, because the weather was too cold to get the horses properly warmed up.

Me and Bulldozer got our share, but there was one from Solo Carrigan. As soon as I saw his name scrawled on the corner of the envelope I growled, "I'm in for another touch."

It reads:

Dear No-Shirt:

Ha! Ha! I fooled you. I don't need no money. Got on the right horse's nose and cleaned up. You've done me a lot of favors now I'm goin' to prove it pays to cast bread on the water. When the news got around you was bringin' a wild horse down, the smart boys got ready to take you. Then comes this stampede. Two of 'em figgered they'd drift from camp to camp and take the honest miners, hook, line and sinker.

Then somebody says that if a race-horse made the tour of mining camps the miners would smell a rat. It's somethin' that ain't natural, like it would be down here where horses are raised.

You can't head off two smart crooks, so they decided to be miners. In their pack-train are two horses faster'n lightnin'. They plan to clean up after the miners have cleaned up on the stampede. This is goin' to hurt, No-Shirt, though I may be dead wrong. But I think your young cousin, Horace is in with 'em.

Best of luck,

Solo Carrigan.

He didn't mention any names, figgerin', no doubt, they'd change 'em any way. But it wasn't hard for me to dope out who they was—Dravus and Hawkins. They was the only pair in the stampede whose horses were better'n average.

ALL this time Cousin Horace is laborin' mightily on his claim and he ain't found even wages. "Wait'll the ground thaws, then go after it," I says. Fin'ly he decides there's something to my advice and he comes to town.

With Solo's warnin' in mind, I'm watchin' Cousin Horace the first time he sees Hawkins and Dravus. Dravus' eyes meet Horace's and he barely shakes his head, plainly sayin', "We ain't supposed to know each other."

After awhile we go down and watch some of the best horses in camp run. "Do you know," Horace says, "I think Lead Nickel can take any horse in camp."

"How about the bay?" Bulldozer asks.

"He can take the bay, too," Horace predicts.

"We're miners," I tell him, just to see what effect it has, "not horse racers."

We separate, but I'm keepin' my eye on Horace. It ain't long until he's settin' in a booth with Hawkins and Dravus drinkin' beer.

"Now get this," Dravus is sayin' and he ain't the charmin' cuss the camp loves any longer. "You know what you're supposed to do—build up McGee and Craig for a big race. Get them to thinkin' their two nags are world-beaters. Understand."

"Sure," Horace answers meekly, "make McGee and Craig think Lead Nickel and the bay can beat the best horses in America. And just watch my smoke. It won't be hard. They don't know it, but that's the way they feel right now. They should be pushovers."

I was sweet on Lead Nickel the first time I saw him. But both me and Bulldozer has got sweeter as the weeks have passed.

A couple of weeks later I see a pack-horse comin' in to Dravus' camp. A strange, hard-boiled lookin' white man is with the horse and when he eases a small pack to the ground I can see it's plenty heavy. "What do you make out of that, No-Shirt?" Bulldozer asks.

"That pack's got gold or lead in it," I answer. "It looks damned queer Dravus would be bringin' gold into this country, but then nothin' he's done so far makes much sense. When it's all over with, though, it'll make plenty of sense."

The warm weather comes, the ground thaws and the miners commence to take out gold a few weeks later. The camp's

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wide open, with plenty of gamblin' if you want it. And most miners do. Dravus and Hawkins have laid off'n the racin' for weeks. but now they revive it again, knowin' the camp has tasted it, been denied it and will want it again.

They organize what they call the Hungry Creek Free-For-All. They think pretty well of their own horse, and back it.

"Why don't you enter a horse, McGee?" Dravus asks. He asks when there's plenty of people around, too, and there's a sneer in his voice. "That bay of yours isn't what you'd call Man Of War, but—I'll bet he's a good pole boat."

Everybody laughs at his wit, and I turn kinda red. I know from now on the bay horse will be called Pole Boat. A pole boat, you know, is one of them flat bottomed affairs you pole up rivers. There ain't nothin' beautiful or dignified about 'em.

"You've got the edge on the rest of us," Dravus continues. "Your cousin Horace is a jockey."

"Maybe that's why we ain't enterin' a horse," I answer. "We don't want to take unfair advantage. Lead Nickel and Pole Boat as you call him are the fastest horses in camp."

"I wouldn't be quite that certain, McGee," he answers with a mockin' smile.

"Easy," Bulldozer whispers in a hoarse warnin'. "He's settin' a trap for you."

"That's the way I feel about it," I tell him.

The Hungry Creek Free-For-All costs Dravus and Hawkins a cool five thousand dollars. They back the horse and it runs a poor third with Hawkins in the saddle. Dravus pays off in gold and does it so cheerfully he makes a lot of friends.

Cousin Horace comes around and starts puttin' the heat on me. "Cousin No-Shirt," he half whines, "they're callin' you a short sport because you won't run your horses. Accordin' to the Old Man no McGee was ever a short sport."

"Your old man was right," I answer.

"Then you'll run Lead Nickel or Pole Boat?" he asks. He's too damned eager. "I'd like to trim them buzzards," he adds.

"Okay," I answer. "Get Lead Nickel in shape."

Bulldozer starts groanin'. "You're askin' for it," he says.

"No," I answer, "Dravus and Hawkins are askin' for it. I'm acceptin'."

"They must've hit it on their claim," Bulldozer says. "They paid their losses in nuggets."

"I checked on the size of their dump," I answer, "and know the ground didn't produce that much. That heavy load they brought in was gold—gold to make the miners think they've got rich ground. And with them it's easy come, easy go. They're squarin' off for the big cleanup."

"Hah!" Bulldozer yells. "That's what I've been tryin' to pound into your thick skull right along. And still you're all for walkin' into their trap."

VI

SEVERAL days later I'm in the Pastime Saloon enjoyin' a honest snort of squareface. Hawkins comes up to me, a snarl on his face. "If your horses are so damned good," he says, "why don't you run 'em?"

I say somethin' and he says somethin' and the first thing we know we're both hollerin' insults. It's then that Dravus steps up.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" he says loudly. "There's no call for this. After all, we're here to mine gold, not hold a race meet. The horse running and betting are incidental. Just to break the monotony of hard work. If the gentleman wants to run his Lead Nickel against my Sea Foam, well and good. And if he wants to bet I'll accommodate him. However, if he feels otherwise, that's his business."

"Keep your shirt on, No-Shirt," Bulldozer warns in a hoarse whisper. "This is it."

I ignore the warnin'. I pretend to get mad. "Sky's the limit," I yell.

"For a man who's been around," Bulldozer whispers, "you're sure the south end of a horse goin' north."

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"I'm afraid," Dravus says, "we'll have to put a limit on your sky, Mr. McGee. After all, we can't bet more than we've got. Our mine is doing well, but it isn't a mint." He wasn't goin' to let me put him in the hole, so he turns to the boys. "If a man bets all he's got, he can't do better, can he?"

They yell their approval, then look at me. "Make your terms, Dravus," I agree.

His eyes narrow. He's havin' a hard time to keep his feelin's to hisself, but he manages it. "I'll bet Sea Foam against your Lead Nickle or Pole Boat, Mr. McGee, whichever you think the faster. I'll place in the hands of a betting commissioner the sum of five thousand dollars in nuggets. You may cover as much as you wish."

"I'll be glad to be stakeholder," Riley Jones offers. I've a hunch he's a Dravus man, but he'll be strictly on the level in payin' off bets in a tough minin' camp. I tell Jones he's okay with me.

The camp goes to work on the track the followin' Sunday and puts it in shape. Holes are filled, the track's widened, they put up a pole rail, and horses drag it with logs lashed together to form a triangle.

Horace smiles all over. "That track's goin' to be plenty fast," he says.

There're a couple of stopwatches in camp besides the one Dravus has got. The rail birds hang around and watch the workouts. Hawkins is ridin' Sea Foam and I can see he knows his business. So does Horace.

It's a toss-up which horse is faster if you can believe a stopwatch. Naturally the oldtimers favor the Alaskan-born horse. They're a pretty loyal bunch. The race is to be held on Sunday, but the Friday before, Bulldozer comes to me lookin' puzzled.

"There's plenty of Sea Foam money," he says, "but the funny thing about it, it's bein' spread around. All the miners backin' Lead Nickel are gettin' a piece of it. But if anybody wants a chunk, Riley Jones says he hasn't got it, but will let 'em know if more Sea Foam money comes in."

I figger it is a smooth move on Dravus' part to build up general interest. Billiard Ball Casler shows up with his pardners the day before the race. "We want that money we give you to bet on Lead Nickel. We're doin' our own bettin' on account of us bein' on the job."

"Takin' any money out of your mine yet?" I ask.

"Nope, or we wouldn't be askin' for our bettin' money," Casler explains. "But we'll hit her sure in a day or two."

EVERYBODY came in for the race. The slope above the track made a good grandstand, and Riley Jones, wearin' a pair of six-guns, was on hand with all the gold in the country. It wasn't much yet, maybe twenty thousand dollars, but it was all the boys had.

A miner who had been a starter at a big track years ago got the startin' job. Several small races was run between miners who figgered their ridin' horses was pretty fast. The horses and a little money changed hands; then Dravus leads Sea Foam out with Hawkins up. And I bring out Lead Nickel. Cousin Horace is on his back.

Both riders, I happen to know, have got their orders from Dravus—to make a close race of it. Horace has been told to pull Lead Nickel on the turns if he shows signs of winnin'. But I got a hunch the man don't live that can pull Lead Nickel.

They make two bad starts and are called back, then fin'ly the starter lets 'em go. At the half they're neck and neck, then Lead Nickel stumbles. It looks like the real thing, but I ain't sure. Cousin Horace has done trick ridin' for the movies where the rider throws a horse off balance. Maybe he's done it now instead of pullin' the stallion. Maybe he ain't. The horse don't go down, but he loses three lengths while tryin' to get his balance. And he never does get back his even, flowin' stride.

It just about breaks my heart to see him try to overtake Sea Foam. He loses by four lengths. I can tell Dravus is plenty irked. He wanted a nose to nose finish with Sea Foam's nose a foot in front.

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"Fortunes of war, McGee," Dravus says. "My horse might have been the one to lose his stride. If you ever want revenge—"

"I'll see what Pole Boat can do," I answer, "then we'll talk about another race."

"Well, we're cleaned out of all the gold we brought with us," Bulldozer moans, "besides what we've took from the mine. If you go after revenge it'll be over my dead body."

I don't make no answer. I know Bulldozer. He'll be yellin' for revenge as loud as the next one. Casler comes down the track about that time. "How'd you come out?" I ask.

"That's a dirty insult," he snaps. "You know doggoned well we'd bet on the Alaska horse."

Bulldozer is pretty blue when he sees Dravus leadin' Lead Nickel away. "I fell in love with that nag," he growls, "and of course Cactus Pete, the mascot, had to go along, too. And he's always good for a laugh."

Well, miners are funny, and it wasn't long before they were all howlin' for revenge. They weren't whining over their losses, you understand. They're good losers, but as they figgered it, Dravus had some of their money, and they wanted it back, along with some of his. And I guess that was the way Dravus sized up the situation. That was why he made Riley Jones spread the Dravus money around—so all of the boys would be nicked. And want revenge. In the meantime, gold was pourin' from the sluice boxes.

One by one the boys came around and said, "No-Shirt that Pole Boat horse of your'n is right fast. Don't you figger he can take a race from Sea Foam or Lead Nickel."

"Pole Boat is kinda lazy," I answered, "and it takes something special to make him go."

But they hung on.

"We know you ain't very long on brains, No-Shirt, but it does seem like you could figger a way of takin' Dravus," they argued.

THERE must've been a hundred thousand dollars in new gold in camp when I started Cousin Horace to givin' Pole Boat a daily workout. "Ain't thought much about racin' him," I lied when folks asked questions. "Just seein' what he can do."

Workin' through Riley Jones, Dravus began droppin' hints regular he would give the boys revenge any time they asked for it. He was buildin' up for the killin'. Me and Bulldozer both saw the signs. Gradually Bulldozer commences to pack water on the other shoulder. At first he was all for lettin' well enough alone.

Now he would say, "No-Shirt, it seems to me you should be able to outfox that slicker. If you can't, it's because you're gettin' old and your mind don't spark no more."

Then I got mad! And a mad McGee is a dangerous McGee. "I'll figger out somethin' to make that lazy nag move," I promise. It takes me a week, but you'll die laughin' when you hear about it.

When I shows signs of wantin' revenge, Dravus gets cautious. He don't want anything goin' wrong. I kinda hang around, seemin'ly beyond earshot, but close enough to get the drift when Dravus puts the pressure on Cousin Horace. "McGee," he says, "you're crooked down there, and you're goin' to be crooked up here. I'll make it worth your while."

"And if I don't string along with you?" Horace asks.

"If you aren't mobbed by the miners up here, you'll be kicked out of racing forever down below," he says softly. "Because I'll frame you."

"What's there in it for me?"

"Ten percent of what we win," Dravus answered. "I want you to trick No-Shirt into making a time run. I'll be on hand with a stopwatch, but I won't be in sight. I want to see just what Pole Boat's got. When that's done, I'll give you the rest of your orders."

When Horace comes around to me, suggetin' a time trial, I say, "Sure. I'm kinda curious to know what that nag can do myself."

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I'm on hand with a borrowed stopwatch, but Bulldozer is back in the brush. Pole Boat makes a good enough showin' to convince Dravus the race is in the bag, specially when he can swing a club over Horace.

Bulldozer comes out of the brush, all grins. "Dravus clocked the horse," he says, "and I saw him and Hawkins shakin' hands. They're feelin' pretty good over the whole business."

I know what'll happen next: Dravus will start something when I'm at the Pastime takin' a little snort for my stomach's sake. And sure enough he does.

"I'll bet Sea Foam against Pole Boat," he offers, "and as much of a side bet as you want to make. My mine's beginning to pay. I'm not quite so hard up as I was the other race."

"You shouldn't be," I remind him. "You had most of the gold in camp when the race was over."

"I've bought the ground adjoining your claims," he says to me and Bulldozer. "I'll bet my claim against yours. If I win, then I'll have a nice piece of ground with your claims and the ones I bought. I can work on a large scale."

I want to say, "Brother you're workin' on a large scale right now." But I said, "The claims me and Bulldozer own are worth more'n your's. But I'm no hog. We'll bet our claims against yours if you throw Lead Nickel in, besides."

Everybody's crowdin' around us. Gettin' the bettin' fever. And that's what Dravus wants. I see him give Riley Jones a high sign, then Jones says, "I'll act as betting commissioner again, if you boys want it that way."

"Okay by me," I answer.

THERE'S a hundred thousand dollars worth of new gold in camp, and Riley Jones is holdin' it all the day of the race. Men have come for miles to bet their money and see the fun. The dust remainin' in their pokes goes to the dance-hall girls and the saloons. The business men are all pullin' for Pole Boat. They've been quietly investigatin' and have learned Riley Jones is frontin' for Dravus. If Pole Boat loses, that money goes out of the country and business falls flat on its face.

The president of the Hungry Creek Chamber of Commerce—as good a dive-keeper as ever lived—goes personally to Dravus. "This race had better be on the level, Dravus," he warns, "or else you'll be to your ears in trouble."

"If No-Shirt McGee's crooked," Dravus answers, pretendin' not to understand, "I want him exposed. I'm a sportsman, and I want to win under fair conditions."

"We aren't worried about McGee," the other says. "But your importin' all that gold, and lettin' on like it come from your claim, looks bad. That's all."

I'm stickin' pretty close to Horace. When he's in the barn with Pole Boat, I'm up in the loft with my ear to a knothole. I'm there when Dravus comes from the Chamber of Commerce president. "Can you dope Pole Boat?" he asks.

"I won't doublecross a horse," Horace answers.

"I suppose pulling him isn't double-crossing him?" Dravus sneers.

"I won't dope him," Horace answers.

"He's a lazy horse," Dravus says, "and I'm expecting to win this race on the level, but if he gets hopped up and starts to take the lead—pull him. And do a good job of it, or I'll take it out of your hide. And do it so you don't get caught or the crowd will take it out of *our* hides."

"I'm between the devil and the deep blue sea," Horace grumbles.

"Exactly. And do you know how much money's up? A hundred grand, plus the value of the McGee-Craig claims, and Pole Boat," Dravus says. "Figure what ten percent of that is, and you'll know what your cut will be." He gives a few more orders, then saunters out. I don't let Horace know I'm listenin'.

But early the mornin' of the race I drag a box up to the barn and put it behind Pole Boat's heels. It's several minutes before he realizes what's in the box, and he sure does come to life. He snorts, paws

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and tries to kick down the stall. I take the box away. And he quiets down.

Fifteen minutes before the race I bring the box in and leave it there. When I lead Pole Boat onto the track, he's sweatin' nicely and is glowin' all over. He's got some of the same thoroughbred strain in him that Lead Nickel has, but I've never seen it show so plain until now.

I help Horace into the saddle, then I look at Dravus. He gives me a fishy glance. He's like a man who smells a rodent and don't know where the odor's comin' from. Bulldozer goes out the back way of the barn, takin' the box with him, and sneaks, unobserved into a clump of brush on the left turn. There's a nice breeze blowin' from that direction towards the finish, to help the horses on their way home.

By that time, everybody's ready for the race.

"Pole Boat's too fine," somebody says. "If I didn't know otherwise I'd say McGee has given the horse a shot."

He don't know the half of it. That's just what McGee's done. And oh what a shot! I've done such a good job I'm almost hoisted on my own petard, as the feller says.

THE starter's bell rings and the crowd yells, "There they go!" But the crowd's only half right. Pole Boat takes a couple of bounds, then looks around like a prize fighter sizin' up the gate. His eyes are blazin' with fire, and plumes of vapor are comin' from his nostrils. Then suddenly he lunges ahead. He's six lengths behind Sea Foam.

Most everybody was watchin' the two horses, but I'm watchin' the jockeys, specially Cousin Horace. All he's got to do is to whip the horse and yell. He can make a real effort to win and still lose. To win ten thousand all he has to do is ride, and nobody can say a word again' him.

But Horace commences to show what he's got. He spreads that nag's strength over the entire mile. Slowly and surely he cuts down Sea Foam's lead. At the half there're two lengths separatin' them. Dravus is cussin' a blue streak. He knows Horace is tryin' to win that race.

At the three-quarters mark Pole Boat can just hold his own. He's spent plenty in overcomin' that lead. Inch by inch Sea Foam gains a half length more.

Suddenly somebody says, "What was that? It sounded like a wolf's howl to me?"

Nobody answers. They're watchin' Pole Boat. He's got strength and speed in his body he's called on before. That howl brought home the old days when as a wild horse he was chased and occasionally nipped by wolves.

The miners have gone crazy. They're yellin', "Come on, Pole Boat! Come on!" They're jumpin' up and down, plumb crazy. Some of the old ones look as if they might have a stroke. They're like men who have writ home for money, figgered they'd been turned down, then sudden discover the mail's late and the check's in the letter.

There's only a length between 'em now, then Pole Boat's nose is even with Hawkin's body. There's plenty of space between 'em, and no chance for Hawkins to do any dirty work in a jam. I held my breath for a second. I thought sure Sea Foam would nose him out, but Pole Boat shot across the finish by a good head and neck. Then he kept right on goin' scatterin' the crowd right and left. He dives into a thicket and nearly knocks Horace off'n his back. It's ten minutes before the jockey gets Pole Boat back to the barn.

"I'm finished, Cousin No-Shirt," he says. "Dravus and Hawkins get anybody they go after. And they'll be after me now. Say, did you think I was crooked?"

"No, I didn't figger you was crooked," I answer, "but I was curious as to how you'd stand up under pressure. The world's been pretty rough on you. But you stood up swell."

"This ain't easy to say," he continues, "but my father never fooled me. I knew he was a four-flusher and moocher. People concluded I was a chip off'n the old block and wherever I was known there was two

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strikes against me at the start. Even when I wouldn't have no part of dirty racin' down below, raw stuff was pulled off and I was the goat."

"That happens," I agreed.

"I got so I hated people," he continues. "Animals were different. They didn't give a damn who my old man was." I felt plenty sorry for the cuss. "So I liked animals and they liked me. There were times when I wondered if any of the McGee tribe was on the level, then I heard about you, and your wild horse, so I stowed away. And you know the rest."

A COUPLE of shadows darken the door. They belong to Dravus and Hawkins. "You dirty, doublecrossing—" Dravus starts in on Horace McGee, then he sees me and Bulldozer and chops off the rest of it.

"That's just the trouble," Bulldozer growls. "You played him for a crook, and us for suckers and lost. We know you packed in gold to cover our bets. We know you tried to swing a club over Horace. We know plenty, and we're passin' it on to the miners if you get tough. You know what that means."

Dravus sees the handwritin' on the wall, and what's more he can read it. "You own Lead Nickel again," he says, "and I'm here to make you an offer. It was sheer accident he lost the first time. I'd like to buy him—"

"And take him to the big California tracks and surprise a lot of people," I cut in. "That'll be a lot of fun. In fact we had it in mind until this stampede headed us off. We may do it yet."

"But Pole Boat," Dravus says, "he isn't that fast, and yet he beat Sea Foam after a poor start."

"Go on and say it," I challenge, " 'And Sea Foam is a ringer!' "

"Sea Foam is good," he admits, "but where did Pole Boat find that speed?"

"Take a look at his rump some time," I answer, "you'll see scars. That's where wolves nipped him when he ran wild. Well, I traps a wolf and put the box in Pole Boat's stall this mornin'. That woke him up. He was ready to go places. Built up a lot of nervous energy.

"Then I notice at the three-quarter mark on the track there's a clump of brush. The wind was right so I had Bulldozer and the wolf cached there. Pole Boat got the scent just as he was tirin'. That started him, but what really made him go to town was Bulldozer howlin' like a wolf.

"Well, gents, mushin's good, you've got three pack-horses and one saddle horse left. You'd better get goin', and I can't say we're sorry to see you go, though we're glad you come."

They go down the trail mutterin' to theirselves and plottin' revenge, which leaves me and Bulldozer facin' Cousin Horace. "What'd you get out of the race?" I ask him.

"Nothin'," he answers, "but the satisfaction of beatin' those buzzards. But they'll frame me with the big tracks Outside."

But it is not in my mind to see this happen to any McGee, even when his name happens to be Horace.

"I had ten thousand dollars ridin' on Pole Boat's nose for you," I tell him, "at even money. So you're worth ten grand. If you can't go south and make the racetrack stewards listen to reason with all that money to hire a good lawyer, then me and Bulldozer will show up down there and tell 'em what happened up here."

"I'll start as soon as I can sell my mining claim," he answers. "I want to ride big-name horses again. And if you ever come south I want the leg up on Lead Nickel in his first race."

"You're in the saddle right now," I tell him.

Then me and Bulldozer go outside again. Riley Jones is payin' off bets as fast as he can, and the Chamber of Commerce members are expectin' the boys to lift the lid tonight.

I figger everybody should be happy until I see Billiard Ball Casler and his

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pardners. They're down in the dumps, so I try to cheer 'em up.

"Seems like we struck the only hungry ground on Hungry Creek," Casler says. "We didn't have a ounce of gold to put on that nag's nose. But . . ." And it strikes me he ain't quite as confident as he was a few months ago, though he ain't bowin' his head none. "But we'll find a creek and . . ."

"I'm turnin' the Dravus-Hawkins claims into the McGee Grubstake Fund For Totterin' Sourdoughs," I tell 'em. "You'd better take over right now and start workin' that claim."

"And what're we goin' to do, No-Shirt?" Bulldozer asks. "Here we are with a minin' proposition that's payin', plenty of gold won in a honest race, not to mention a three-horse racin' string and a porcupine mascot."

"We're goin' to work that claim, brother," I tell him, "until the freeze-up. Then we're headin' south with the geese, ducks, our three-horse racin' string and—a porcupine."

Kid Tarzan

SOONER or later, of course, actual life always gets around to imitating fiction. And this time it's ARGOSY's writer, Edgar Rice Burroughs, who has set the style for what turns up in South Africa—a twelve-year-old boy who was raised by baboons.

The story, vouched for by Professor Raymond A. Dart of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, is like a page from "Tarzan of the Apes." This Negro boy lived the life of the baboons who had kidnaped him: hunted with them, walked about on all fours, and slept in the bush—always entirely naked. He ate crickets, ostrich eggs, prickly pears, green mealies (corn), and wild honey.

The little brother of the baboons has been named Lucas and taught to speak South African Dutch. When he was captured by policemen he could make only the guttural sounds of the anthropoids which had raised him. According to anthropologists, this is apparently the first case known of a human adopted and reared by anthropoids—that is, outside of the pages of the ARGOSY.

—*Charles Dorman*

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BUT, AL, I'VE GOT TO BE A TWO-TIMER—MY BEARD IS SO TOUGH
MINE IS TOO, BUT THIS LISTERINE SHAVING CREAM GIVES ME THE CLOSEST, MOST PAINLESS SHAVE I EVER HAD
THAT FREE 20-SHAVE SAMPLE MADE ME A CUSTOMER FOR LIFE; IT SOFTENS THE TOUGHEST BEARD—LEAVES THE SKIN COOL AND PLIANT—AND BOY, WHAT ECONOMY! 24 QUARTS OF SOOTHING LATHER TO THE TUBE—IT SEEMS TO LAST FOREVER!
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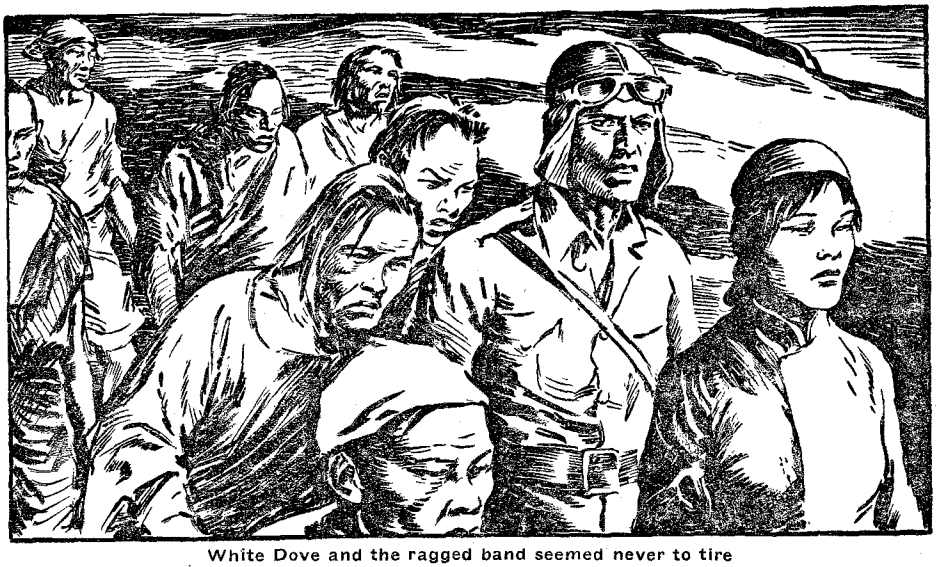

White Dove and the ragged band seemed never to tire

Tonight We March

By ROBERT W. COCHRAN

Author of "Americans Are Different", "White Lady", etc.

In a desolate, ravaged land an American flyer discovers why a million deaths do not mean defeat, why China will never die

HE had been cursing second-hand flying equipment for two months; so that now, seeing all his dire predictions suddenly fulfilled, he could find no words suitable to express his sentiments.

Two months, at a thousand American dollars a month, was longer than a lot of the pilots he had been flying with lasted. A great deal longer than some of the enemy pilots he had met in the sky had lasted. It was two more days until payday. Carey wouldn't get her alimony, Pat wouldn't get the three hundred necessary to let her finish the last half of her Junior year. He remembered an expression, "You do what you do."

The ground smacked up against the landing gear and he cut the sobbing motor as the plane cartwheeled on one wing. Then he was pulling himself into the cockpit, like a snail retreating into its shell, as the plane came to rest, bottom up.

He struggled with the harness, pushing his body upward by pressing the top of his head against the ground. But it took a much longer time to dig a trench that would allow him to squirm out from beneath his prison.

It was no better or worse than a lot of China he had seen. Not a great deal of difference, he thought, between it and some of the country outside Omaha. He had made worse landings, many of them. He remembered, as he settled down on the wing of the plane, that first forced landing in Belgium. Twenty-one years ago, that was. He'd never forget it, even if he wanted to: there was the shortened right leg where the bone had been set poorly.

Forty-three years old. What the hell business did he have fighting another man's war ten thousand miles from home at that

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age? He had asked himself that a great many times. And since he still didn't have an answer, he supposed he would continue to put the question. Anyway it seemed better than going on relief or licking someone's boots for a P.W.A. job.

He rose reluctantly and turned to stare at the setting sun. "Might as well get going, Chick," he remarked, and started walking in the direction of the descending sun. Not that it mattered. He was lost, wholly and completely lost, and had been lost for two hours, but that morning when he had left the field he had taken off with the sun in his eyes, so it was sound reasoning that he must keep the sun in his eyes if he expected to return.

He had been feeling pretty cocky with his day's work until two hours back. An hour after leaving the field he had come upon and bombed to extinction a whole troop train of Japanese soldiers. True, there had been that little gunplay from the ground that had compelled him to make a forced landing. It didn't matter much that his compass had been destroyed and the oil feed punctured. He repaired the latter and ignored the former. A good pilot needed nothing more than a bamboo stick and a piece of silk in order to fly. The Chinese, at least, seemed to think that, for the repairs they gave their second-hand planes would hardly have kept a wheelbarrow running.

"Quiet, please," he shouted, and grinned, for even his own voice made hardly any impression on the vast void of silence that surrounded him.

"There's a war going on around here, Chick," he said, speaking confidentially. "You'd better get a wiggle on; you haven't missed a good war in twenty years."

HE hadn't eaten since breakfast at dawn, and he decided if he got back he would carry reserve food and water in future. The sun was almost beneath the horizon when he saw brown shapes against the brown earth.

Friends, he said, and remembering a mistake he had made in Spain the year before, he loosened the gun in its holster.

All Chinese looked alike to him. He stared at these as they came nearer, seeing nothing individual about them.

"Hungry," he said, and made a motion towards his mouth, opening and closing his jaws.

There were nine of them. They stopped, looking from him to each other questioningly. "Water," he said, and raised his cupped hand to his lips as though drinking.

They still stood, looking all around as though expecting to see others like him pop from the ground. "Come on," he said, "let's get going, there's a war on." They retreated before him and parted to let him pass, then fell in a few paces behind his back.

"Which way?" He pointed vaguely left and right. One of them pointed too, and he went in the direction indicated.

It was growing increasingly hard to see where he was walking, and suddenly, with no warning, something was thrust between his legs and he felt, as he went sprawling, the weight of the little brown men on his back.

He had his hand on his gun but never quite succeeded in getting it from the holster. The words came hissingly from their lips as they bound his hands and jerked him to his feet.

"Friend," he said, repeating the word again and again, while mentally he cursed his laziness in not having learned their language, at least enough of it to make them understand that he was a friend.

They walked faster now, pulling him whenever he fell behind, with the rope that they had fastened about his neck. Carey, he thought, will be sore as hell when she doesn't get her alimony. Probably want to swear out a warrant for me or something. He wasn't worried so much about Carey, but he wished he had been able to send Pat enough to complete her college education.

He remembered stories that he had heard of how prisoners were treated by natives in the back country, and wondered whether the smart thing wouldn't have been to have used his gun before it was taken from him. After all, these people were his friends,

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or at least these were the people he was being paid to fight for. There was scant comfort in that thought, for he couldn't erase from his mind the memory of other foreigners captured by the natives and turned over to the women. Women, he thought bitterly, are the cause of all the hell in the world. If it hadn't been for Carey he wouldn't be over here now, sticking his neck out just so she could have the two hundred a month the court had granted her when they split up. Two hundred a month was a different matter back in 1929. Now, ten years later, it meant dropping bombs on two or three thousand little brown men; it meant watching maybe three or four enemy planes crash in flames, it meant a forced landing or two for temporary repairs. It meant, today, capture by some rough little barbarians who were paying him a thousand dollars a month to do their dirty work and were apparently going to cancel the debt by wiping him out completely.

He was only dimly aware of the other figures that moved at his side. It was completely dark. The unbroken darkness of a vast country; no light as far as eyes could see, no sound expect the soft mutter of their own feet on the brown earth.

Because of the rope about his neck he did not dare lag behind. Because of his bound hands he could think of no way to better his position. His captors conversed together at times, their low voices keeping abreast of him, their sharp, clipped words without meaning.

HE supposed they might have walked five miles in the darkness when he was aware of an increased excitement among his captors. Suddenly he smelled the odor of burning wood, and a moment later saw the flickering flames of a fire close to the ground.

Shadows moved around the blaze and added to the smell of the burning wood was that of a not too clean camp. There were, he saw, no dogs barking at their approach. This was unusual enough to make an impression on his mind. When they were still a hundred yards from the fire, fresh fuel was thrown on the flames and they leaped skyward, making grotesque dancing shadows of the people who stood about.

A slim figure in clothing a little cleaner, a little less ragged than that worn by the other natives moved forward and stared intently at the aviator. There was the quick bark of a question, and the man who held the rope that was fastened to Chick Enders spoke humbly in reply.

"Come here." He was so surprised to hear the command in English that for a moment he stood transfixed. The man with the rope spoke again and the one who was apparently the leader answered him.

"I'm an American," Chick Enders said. "I fight for China. I fly war bird for Chinese."

"You fight for money," the leader said contemptuously. "We fight for love of China."

"At that," Chick Enders said, "I accomplish more in a day than you can in a month, in a year."

The leader shrugged and spoke a command. The rope was loosened from his neck and a moment later the bonds dropped from his arms. He rubbed his hands gingerly together to restore the circulation.

Fried rice patties were brought to him, still warm from the fire. He ate them hungrily, and saw that the natives who had brought him in were also eating. Bolting the food and licking their greasy fingers noisily.

"Your name?" the leader asked when he had finished eating.

"Chick Enders," he said, "and yours?"

The slim figure hesitated, black eyes searching the aviator's face. "In your language you would say White Dove," the answer came finally.

"White Dove," Chick said, and grinned in appreciation of the jest. "A good name for a leader of warring bandits."

"Bandits!" The leader spat out the word. "Who says we are bandits? Did not your own countrymen fight the English for their freedom?"

"Have it your way," Enders said agreeably. "How about getting me a horse?"

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"A horse! If I had a horse would I not ride it myself? If I had fifty horses for my men. . . . Do you know where I can get fifty horses?"

"Are you crazy?" Enders said. "Do I look like a stable? Where are we? How far is Hankow?"

"Hankow," White Dove said, "over there, three, four days' walk."

"Walk, four days?" Enders said. "You're crazy." Then he thought of Pat waiting for a check; perhaps she needed clothes, maybe her rent was due; then there was always tuition. He didn't think so much about Carey's alimony. White Dove was looking at him contemptuously. "All right," he said, rising, "which way?"

A ghost of a smile flicked across White Dove's face. "You are not afraid, Mr. Enders, you walk through the night alone?"

"Afraid?" Chick Enders scoffed. "I stopped being afraid in Germany twenty years ago. A man's dead in this business the first day he takes to the air. Every day you live after that is just borrowed time. I've got a wife and girl back in the States—or I should say I had a wife. She kicked me out because I wouldn't give up this business."

"I had a husband," White Dove said evenly. "The Japanese killed him. If only we had horses I would not care so much."

Enders said, "I knew there was something strange about you. You looked kind of—well, kind of soft to be in this show. War isn't any place for a woman."

"It is my place," White Dove said. "While there are two of us left in the land, Japan shall not be the victor." She ended by throwing a command in her own language at the circle of men. "Come," she said to Enders, "we will escort the bird man on his way to Hankow."

"It's odd," Enders said later as they walked through the soft darkness, "finding a woman like you in a place like this, and having you speak English, too."

"I was not always here," White Dove said. "When my husband was killed I took his place. He had a thousand men, I have fifty, but with horses we would be the same as a thousand." She shrugged.

"What can you do with your fifty men?" Enders asked. "One bomb would wipe out the lot of you."

"But first the bomb must find us. You will see. Tonight we march, tomorrow we rest. Can the eagle catch the rabbit at night? Can he follow him into his burrow in the morning?"

ENDERS knew by daylight that his companions were not playing at war. They were serious about it, marching silently except for occasional soft-spoken commands from the leader. Weary and tired to the bone, he would have welcomed a rest many hours before it came. Had it not been that he refused to allow a woman to outdo him, he would have asked for it. He cursed the German who had shortened his leg for him twenty years before. His mouth was parched as a sun-drenched bone, yet to ask for water when it was obvious there was no water would be too ridiculous.

His body ached and his shortened leg grew first painful and then numb, but he kept doggedly on. It was not yet dawn when they came to the banks of a small river. He fell upon his knees and like the others splashed water into his mouth with his hand. They forded the stream, wading waist-deep in the sluggish current, and the bare, flat land stretched in the early dawn for miles before them.

White Dove spoke to her men and said to Enders, "We will stay here for the day. If only we had horses, over there," she pointed, "is a Japanese outpost, food, ammunition, with only a handful of men to guard them. Each day they come out and pillage the countryside. With horses we could attack them."

"They have horses?" Enders asked.

"Our horses, horses of my countrymen, and if we attack the walls, they will kill the horses before they will surrender."

One man disengaged himself from the others and moved out across the plain.

"We do like this," White Dove said, and showed him how to scoop out a shallow trench that would hold his body.

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"But doesn't the sun get pretty hot?" He looked at the first red rim of it on the horizon.

"This is a war," White Dove said. "Should we complain at the heat of the sun when thousands, millions of our people are dying?"

"Well"—Enders looked at the meager protection the trench offered—"if a Jap plane gets an eyeful of us, we're apt to do some dying ourselves."

"We are not afraid to die," White Dove said proudly. "We live to save our country. If dying helps our cause, we are glad to die."

"But you'd rather die on horseback," Enders said.

"You joke, Mr. Enders. Would you treat war so lightly if your wife, your daughter were being abused by soldiers and afterwards killed? If Chicago instead of Hankow were being bombed?"

"Chicago?" Enders said. "What do you know of Chicago?"

"I studied there for six years; then the war, and I came back to try to help my country, my poor country."

"War isn't for women. There are ten million men able to fight in China."

"Yes," White Dove said, "ten million men, like these poor men of mine. They are like sheep without a leader. What China needs most is leaders. With, oh, so very little money, I could rouse China. We are hopeless only because we are ignorant of what is taking place. One great leader with other strong leaders under him could free the land in a single month. China sleeps, she is not dead; some day will come the awakening."

"Lady," Enders said fervently, "if I was planning to conquer this country, my first move would be to get rid of a certain young woman named White Dove."

"It would not matter, there will be others. I do what I can, and when I fall someone else will take up where I stop. China has never been conquered. Next year, ten years, twenty years our enemies may be among us, then suddenly we are free. It has been so before, it will be so again."

Enders watched the native men pull loose dirt over their prone figures and followed their example. Whether for protection from the sun or to make them harder to see from a plane, it did not matter; he was convinced that for whatever reason it was advisable to follow their actions.

A SUDDEN outburst of whispered conversation drew his attention and he followed the direction of White Dove's eyes. Far, far out across the plain a blot spread and became a dozen or more little dots. White Dove's face became masklike as she stared. "Dogs," she said, "murderers, butchers. They go now and kill and loot the native villages. It is sport to them, they think it fun. If we had guns, if we had horses!"

"But why," Enders asked, "if this is the garrison don't you try to capture the place while they are away?"

"It would be nice," she said, "nice for them. They have rifles that will shoot a mile. And always there is left a guard behind. One shot, and the lot of them would come back. No, we must fight a different war from that."

"Listen," Enders said, "tomorrow's payday for me. If I don't show up in Hanhow I don't get any money. My wife needs her alimony, or so she says; the kid needs her money to pay for her last semester at school. If I get some horses out of that dump, will you let me take one and tell me how to get to Hankow?"

"Are you mad," White Dove asked, "or do you still play at war?"

"Perhaps a little of both. I tell you I've been dead twenty years. Maybe I've lived on borrowed time long enough. But if I come through, you get your horses, I get my pay check. Is it a deal?"

"It's a deal, but death follows folly. Wisdom and bravery are sisters."

"You do what you do. Is that a Chinese proverb, or did I pick it up in Spain or perhaps France? Anyway, it holds good. I'm hungry as a shark, but I suppose if I asked about food you'd tell me that this is a war. Of course I'll need my gun?"

"Yes," White Dove agreed, "you couldn't

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hope to take the place with your bare hands. Or do you expect to go up to the gates and ask for some horses?"

"It might not be as crazy as what I plan to do at that."

It was past midday, he judged by the position of the sun, before the horsemen came back across the plain and disappeared in the rough country beyond. "You've heard of Troy?" Enders asked.

"I studied the Greek and Italian poets in your college. Are we to make a Trojan Horse?"

"It's the same principle, without the horse," Enders admitted. "How would your men take the suggestion that I approach this place with six captives?"

"My men never question my commands, but I fail to see that killing six of them will help you get my horses or help your wife get her alimony."

"Forget the wife angle for a minute. If I walk in there with six Chinese captives, the least they can do is to hold all of us until they contact their headquarters."

"And that, Mr. Enders, will be about ten minutes after they see you. Maybe you haven't heard of the radio."

"Unless their radio is better than the one I had on the plane, it won't do them much good. But anyway, assuming they had a radio, if I say that I'm an American pilot and the prisoners tried to rob me, they'll have to wait long enough to investigate."

"Wait? They'll wait long enough to call a firing squad. Were it for myself, I would not hesitate; for my men, no. I refuse to send them to certain death. You are no better than the Japanese. You would slaughter these ignorant peasants so that your wife and daughter can get their money on time."

"I don't see but what my plan is better than this. What do you expect to gain, lying out in the hot sun all day and walking all night? Your men are starved. They couldn't fight anyway, they're too weak."

"They'll fight," White Dove said, "when the time comes, and it will come. That is why we wait; carelessness follows safety. Even now one of my men is waiting for nightfall to see if there is not some way for us to enter undetected. Tonight, when it is dark, we will again advance; tomorrow we will be beyond the garrison. You may leave us then. If you are lucky, in two, three days you will be in Hankow. It is time you got some sleep. Look, the ignorant coolies you would slaughter have already slept for many hours."

Gnats and bugs settled upon them from the air and ants burrowed up from the ground and tortured them, but in spite of these and the hot sun, after a time Enders slept. The sun had already set when he awoke, though it was not yet entirely dark.

White Dove said, when he had stirred and opened his eyes, "I have thought of a plan, Mr. Enders. It is not without risk for you, and for me."

"I bet it's good," Enders said.

"It is very simple, so simple that they may not suspect a plot. You and I can go alone. You as an American aviator, I as your Chinese wife. It isn't improbable that a Chinese girl educated in America might marry an American. You need not give your right name; then if an investigation is started, it will take time."

"I don't like it," Enders said. "War isn't the place for a woman."

"But you must not think of me. Think of the daughter who must have the money for her education, think of the wife's alimony."

"If you're trying to be nasty, skip it. I earned that thousand bucks, every penny of it."

"Oh, certainly, it is the price my country must pay when it buys patriotism."

"I hate to do it," Enders said, "but it looks like there's no other way."

"In a little while it will be dark; then we will eat and go back to the river for a drink. After that we will start. I must tell the men what to do." She spoke to them at length, and Enders saw the black looks that were thrown at him. He couldn't blame them. Under other conditions he would refuse to go through with it, but had proposed the plan herself.

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IT WAS quite dark when they left the river and started in the direction that the horsemen had taken across the plain. "I will say," White Dove said, "that I am an American Chinese. As White Dove I am known to them all. They would kill both of us if they suspected my real name."

"We wouldn't be any better if they knew mine, so you'd better start calling me something else. . . . How about Perkins, Joe Perkins? The real Joe Perkins had an argument with a Heinie about half a mile above Belgium back in eighteen. It was a dead heat, if you know what that means."

"Poor Joe, I mean the real Joe, of course. And my name will be Nana. It would not do for an American girl to have a too Chinese name. My men are to follow and wait until we are within the walls. If we can't let them in, they are to try to scale the walls. At the signal of two shots fired close together, they are to enter at any cost."

"Sister," he said admiringly, "I'll hand it to you. You've got what it takes."

"China has what it takes," she corrected.

Enders did not question the direction that the girl took. She appeared to know unfalteringly the way she wanted to go, and they traveled faster than they had the previous night. He was stiff and sore, but after a time his muscles responded more easily and he was almost at the point of welcoming the approaching crisis.

White Dove had returned the gun to him, and when they saw lights flickering dimly from a rise in the ground he settled it freely in the holster. "Keep your chin up, Nana," he said, laughing at the unfamiliar name, "and we'll put this over."

"You are brave, Joe Perkins. I hope the real Joe is watching over you tonight. If we succeed, tomorrow night you will be in Hankow."

"Here's hoping," Enders said.

A night bird whistled eerily from a little way ahead of them, and Enders jumped when the sound was answered by his companion. A form came out of the darkness and White Dove held whispered conversation.

"He says," she told Enders as they continued, "that there are forty or fifty men in the place and some women, mostly native women kept prisoners. All the men are mounted. Horses, do you understand, horses for all of us. With fifty mounted men I can recruit a thousand, ten thousand. I can save China if we succeed here tonight."

"Nana, we'll take this place like Grant took Richmond. You stick to your Uncle Joe and we'll have horses to burn."

They were beneath the shade of the wall before the sounds beyond told them that even in the darkness their approach had been seen. A flare was hurled down from above, and in the glare they could feel a score of eyes upon them.

There was a rattling of chains and a massive wooden gate swung inward. It was, Enders saw as they went forward, reinforced by more wood on the inside. Two or three dozen men in uniform stared at them suspiciously.

"Where's the boss?" Enders asked.

A man came forward. He walked cautiously, a gun ready in his hand. "Who you?" he asked in English. "What want?"

"Americans. Airplane." He made a motion of a plane going through the air with his hand. "Wreck." He pointed back the way they had come and then indicated their travel-stained clothes. "Walk far," he said to discourage them from looking for the plane. "Two days."

THEY were ushered into what Enders saw had been at one time only a small village. Seven or eight houses seemed to be all the buildings. About these a wall had been built. A man, apparently the officer in charge, had been summoned, and he too approached, gun in hand. He spoke to the first man who had questioned them and pointed to White Dove. "This woman Chinese girl," the first man interpreted.

"Wife," Enders said, "American girl. Tell them," he commanded White Dove.

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"I am American girl from Chicago," White Dove said.

The two men conversed again, and the interpreter demanded, "What you want?"

"Hungry, tired, go long way, Hong Kong." He knew that Hong Kong was already in the hands of the Japanese and hoped that this would allay their suspicions. The entire garrison, he decided, had been turned out. Beyond the soldiers he could see the frightened faces of the women and girls and even a few old men, used, he decided, as laborers.

After another dialogue the man who spoke English said, "Give gun. You stay tonight. Tomorrow we see."

Enders thought there was an air of expectancy in the faces that looked at him from all sides. "No gun," he said, "gun I keep."

The men smiled at each other, and White Dove said as though in fear, "Don't give up your gun, Joe."

"Show us some place to stay," Enders said, "then bring some food."

I'm a fool, he thought. If I'd only had the girl tell her men to get over the wall in back while we were all palavering here. He moved his hand to his gunbutt and ordered, "Come on, now, something to eat, a place to stay."

A girl had pushed her way through the throng and spoke in high-pitched words to the commander. White Dove's fingers tightened on his arm. Vaguely he was aware that a night bird whistled from somewhere in behind the houses. The interpreter raised his gun. "This no American girl, this Chinese girl. This girl . . ." He had brought his pistol up and it was leveled at White Dove's breast.

"Why, you—" Enders' right foot shot up and the gun exploded before it left the man's fingers to fall somewhere beyond the flares that lit the night. There was a mutter and a stir among the Japanese soldiers and Enders brought his own gun from the holster. "We're staying here tonight, see?"

Again that soft, plaintive whistle of a night bird came from within the walls, and immediately it was answered. Enders saw that others, too, had heard it this time. They were all listening. The commander barked an order, and the men melted into the darkness.

White Dove was whispering in his ear. "Those are my men," she said, triumph creeping into her voice. A cry came from the blackness and was stopped short. "Quick," White Dove said, "put out the flares." As she spoke she moved toward the nearest one; then suddenly the place was alive with men. Hard, tight-lipped men armed with knives and clubs. In a moment the place was in complete darkness, and Enders caught White Dove's arm and backed with her until he was against the wall. His gun ready, he waited. . . .

SOMETIMES far away, sometimes near at hand, there would be a scuffling struggle, then suddenly silence. When his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, Enders saw stealthy, shadowy figures. A shot rang out and a bullet tugged at the sleeve of his coat. He fired at the flash and dropped to the ground, pulling White Dove down with him.

A body dropped from the wall above upon his back, and before he could free himself another and a third made added weight upon his prone figure. Faintly, as though from a long distance, he heard White Dove barking orders. The last thing he remembered was her voice begging him in English to speak to her.

When he returned to consciousness the flares had been lit and the evil-appearing, gaunt men who served under White Dove were seated in a ring eating with loud, unmuffled sounds.

"Joe," White Dove said, "Mr. Enders, you had me very much frightened."

"The horses," Enders said, "did you get the horses?"

"Forty-two of them, and tomorrow I shall escort you to Hankow."

"Tomorrow," Enders said, "is payday. We're leaving now."

His head seemed to be split apart and he raised his hands to see whether it was really in one piece.

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"You can't go tonight," White Dove said. "You're hurt, maybe badly hurt."

"This is war," Enders reminded her. "Did you forget? How about the enemy?" He looked around for the Japanese.

"I lost twelve men," White Dove said soberly. "The Japanese—we cannot take prisoners. You understand."

"Why, yes," Enders said doubtfully. "Now if I can have that horse . . ."

It was late the next afternoon when they sighted Hankow. "Now," White Dove said, "I must return to my men. They have gone to the hills to wait for me. Horses, men—I tell you China will be free. In a month I will have a thousand, ten thousand men, and horses and cannon and planes. Perhaps then you will show me how to fly so that I can quicker rid my country of its oppressors."

"I think you'll do it," Enders said; "you've got what it takes. But come on into Hankow with me; I want to send back a present."

She said suspiciously, "A present? What present? You would not hand me over to the military. The regular army has small use for people like us."

"I promise nothing shall harm you. We do what we do," he finished under his breath.

It was two hours later before he had been able to convince army officials that he was really Chick Enders in the flesh. When the red tape had been completed and his thousand dollars was safe in his pocket, he went back to where White Dove waited his return.

"This," he said, handing her the money, "is for you. It may mean another ten horses."

"You cannot do this. There is your wife, your daughter. I won't take it."

"Pat can go visit her mother for a month. Carey isn't one not to have put something aside for a rainy day."

"But you have already done so much. China can never repay you. . . ."

"We do what we do," he said. "Is that a Chinese proverb, or did I pick it up in Morocco or South America?"

"It will be China's cry of freedom," she said. "Tomorrow, next month, next year, it will ring from every housetop."

He watched her ride away before he turned in the direction of his own quarters. There were two cablegrams under the door to his room.

The first one read:

DON'T SEND MONEY, GETTING MARRIED TODAY, LEAVING COLLEGE. LOVE.
PAT.

The second was even more brief:

PAT MARRIED, SEND HER ALLOWANCE WITH ALIMONY.
CAREY.

He put the first in his pocket and tore the second into little pieces. Just before he fell asleep he muttered drowsily, "We do what we do, Carey, old girl."

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Bible Bill swung his ax at the towline, and those drunken Irishmen raved like madmen

Mother Damnation

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Begin now this lusty and colorful tale of the roaring days on the Erie Canal

THOSE were the roaring days of the Erie Canal—the days when the Ditch was teeming with commerce and the canalmen were lusty, brawling fellows who used their fists well and often and spent their cash in violent play at the Swillberg Tavern.

But more than a match for these canalmen is Mother Damnation, proprietress of the Tavern. Built like the Statue of Liberty, she can bring down the roof with a song or toss out a brawler with equal ease; and it's a sight to see her dive into the canal in her flaming red bathing suit. A sight for anyone but Bible Bill MacBride.

For Bible Bill, the mightiest canaller of them all and the owner of three spick-and-span boats, is so intensely God-fearing that he will knock a man out for swearing. So it is only natural that Bill should regard the lusty Mother Damnation as a sinful woman, that he should stride into the Swillberg Tavern—to consign it and its proprietress to perdition. These two—Bible Bill and Mother Damnation—feud endlessly.

LOW-BRIDGE (who is telling the story) soon discovers that his captain is even a stranger man than he had thought. For one night Bible Bill confesses that he hates the canal and its life; and when Low-Bridge tells him he cannot quit the life that he is born to, Bill flies into a fury. He can break away; he is the Master of his Fate! It's all too much for Low-Bridge. He wonders what

This story began in last week's Argosy

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the books are that Bible Bill reads with such surreptitious avidity, but he discounts as impossible the story that Bible Bill has been seen drunk—and coming out of a burlesque show!

Always there have been thefts along the canal, and Mother Damnation has been suspected of complicity. But now, for no apparent reason, an old watchman is murdered, and that becomes the excitement of the moment. Meanwhile, Bible Bill appears to be in unusual haste to deliver his cargoes; he is more brusque and aloof than usual; and Low-Bridge notes that he has scarcely eaten since the death of Bill Lacy, the watchman. . . .

CHAPTER V

DANGER SIGNALS FLYING

SURE, it's easy enough to figure the weather signals after the storm. The signs that summer were all there. It was just that I couldn't put 'em together.

Take for instance that haul back to Buffalo, empty. I don't mean without a cargo all the way—there was things like bed-springs from Utica to Syracuse, an' salt from Syracuse to Bushnell's Basin—driblets like that. But there wasn't any profit. All along the ditch the agents an' boaters was gloomy, everyone cursin' the railroads, Cleveland, the Czar of Russia, blamin' them for the canal going to pot. Along the docks there wasn't much to do but sit back an' spit an' fish. Spin yarns an' gossip.

That haul, most of the talk was about Jim Lacy's murder. But it was a slow drag; time we pulled out of Syracuse the subject had lost interest. Meantime Bill had stuck down in his cabin readin' those books he'd fetched aboard, like he'd forgot all about the canal. Evenings he'd come up for air, an' perhaps play a couple of sad hymns on his ocarina, but he'd whack back into his cabin again an' shut the hatch after him. I guess those books had him pretty fascinated.

Then *whap!* With Lock Twenty-eight and Swillberg on the horizon, he comes out on deck like a riot. Put on extra mules! All hands turn out! Speed it up!

We got through that lock like a bat out of hell! The other locks? No. This one? Yes. Lorna wasn't to home, the lock-tender said, and Bill said it was okay, he couldn't stop anyhow as he had a hurry-up order waitin' at Buffalo. I could see he was on tenterhooks to get out of there. There's a bunch of boats tied up or jockeying at the docks along Swillberg, and he shouted at the other captains to drop their lines and give fast freight the right of way. But passing Swillberg Tavern there was a delay. Splash! There's Mother Damnation putting on her divin' act for the boys. Takes off from the bank like a big red mermaid, an' comes swimming out through the orange rinds to blow-whale alongside the *Genesis*.

"Ship ahoy!" she booms up, voice like a fog horn. "That you, Noah? What's your hurry with the Ark? Ain't you gonna stop off an' pay me a visit this trip?"

Bill was on the bow like a figurehead, reeling out the towrope. "If I had my way," he bellowed down, "I'd stop off and throw that tavern of yours into the bilge with you! You'd be run out of town and—"

"Is that the way to talk to an honest woman swims out to invite you an' your crew ashore for a free round of beer?"

"You'll entice my crew with no free beers, Jezebel! Willie!" he roared through his hands at the mule boy. "Whip up those animals! Lay it on! Are you anchored there to the towpath? I'll show these canallers how long an honest boater will linger in this infamous sink of iniquity!"

The red head down in the water gave him a laugh. "Still playin' sky-pilot, are you, big boy? Still up on your high horse? Don't worry, my Holy Joe, you'll come down! I've seen your kind before!"

Wow! there was a crowd of boaters listening from the bank, and Bible Bill was so hot-collared to get out of there that he almost let us ram into Professor Murgatroyd, the tattoo artist, comin' around the bend in his circus launch. That made the crowd laugh harder—Murgatroyd with his muttonchop whiskers yelling

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in fright as the big *Genesis* grazed his launch. We hauled out of that stretch of the canal, I can tell you.

You think of the old canal as peaceful. Huh, it wasn't so peaceful aboard the *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Leviticus* in the days that followed. That Swillberg business upset Bible Bill like anything. Every time we come near the berg, he'd put on that rush-haul stunt, and every time there was Mother Damnation divin' off the bank and swimming out, red headed and roarin', to exchange compliments. Seemed like she just laid in wait for Bill's black mules to come in sight; then she'd play divin' Venus just to torment him.

It tormented him, too. It tormented him plenty. There's always a bunch of canalmen around the woman's tavern, and Bill didn't like being taunted in front of that crowd. Especially with Lorna Tenny at the lock ahead, waitin' at the gates for him to come along. It was getting around that Bill and this Swillberg queen was staging a perpetual feud—didn't take long for a story like that to travel the canal—and the boaters added a lot to the yarn, like the rumor I heard that Mother Damnation had challenged Bible Bill to a prizefight, ten-ounce gloves, to be held at her saloon on the Fourth of July. If you think Bible Bill wasn't hot under his stiff collar about that!

THERE was other rumors floatin' the canal that summer, too. Rumors that didn't have no element of humor. With business on the bum, boaters fightin' over cargo and times bad, things was gettin' tough on the ditch. You'd see factories closed in the towns you went through, and there was a lot of hungry men walkin' the towpath. Generally the canal don't go through the snootiest neighborhood of a city, and in some of those towns it was dangerous to walk the towpath at night if you had the change for a dollar.

Petty Thievery generally pals around with Old Man Hard Times, and on the ditch it turned into Larceny. The boaters had to keep a weather eye on their deck-gear, or tomorrow they'd find it missing. Canal pirates! Add that to a waterfront like Swillberg, and it's Grand Larceny.

"Know what they're callin' Lock Twenty-eight there?" a bridge-tender at Spencerport told Bible Bill and me. "The Golden Gates. On account of the dead men floatin' through—Dapper Dan and Jim Lacey who was murdered at Swillberg there. They say that port is gettin' like the Barbary Coast. Cap Eagercheek, through here last week, told me the boaters was losin' more stuff at Swillberg than anywhere along the ditch. Robbery."

The bridge-tender put his finger aside his nose, ominous. "I heard a rumor," he confided, "that after that bank watch was croaked there was talk of doin' something about it. The canalmen. Sort of like that Ku Klux crowd once took hold of the pirates on the ditch. Remember? Back after the Civil War, the boaters organized a sort of vigilantes."

Yeah, I could remember my pa telling about it. The war had raised hob, and with a lot of soldiers drifting back and bums on the loose—the boaters had had to fight another Civil War of their own. There'd been this bunch who wore masks. It ain't in the history books. They called themselves the Secret Committee.

Well, what with that sort of business afoot, an' the ditch getting weedy, it wasn't no fun workin' for Bible Bill. He didn't play his ocarina much that summer. His forehead was like a plowed field, worried. One Sunday he prayed, askin' the Almighty to save Mother Damnation. With the fighting over cargo and the agents cuttin' rates, you'd have thought he'd had somethin' more than this tavern queen to worry about.

It's a fact he got odder and odder. He took to lockin' himself in his cabin nights an' reading those books he'd fetched aboard; I'd see his lamp burnin' late at all hours. Tyin' up at some small town, he'd duck off by himself without sayin' where or why; you might come on him walkin' the streets with his head tucked down in his collar, so wrapped up in

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thoughts he wouldn't recognize you when he bumped into you.

On deck his temper got raw as an exposed nerve, and he'd blow up like a Roman candle over anything at all. Something was eating him, anybody could see. His face took on a gnawed kind of look—I guess it exaggerated all his peculiar characteristics, so to speak. But it all seemed to boil down to that Swillberg dame, and his girl being close by at Lock Twenty-eight.

"She's got to get out of there, Lowbridge!" It was the night after we breezed through with a lumber haul, goin' east. "She's got to get out of that sink of iniquity, do you hear?"

I stared at him. He'd walked aft to where I was leaning on the tiller, and for five minutes he'd paced up and down in front of me without saying nothin'. It was sort of weird in the starlight, him blurting out at me like that. As if the words had been choking him for a long time and he couldn't hold them inside him any longer.

"Who's got to get out of where?" I asked.

"Lorna! I can't stand the thought of her being in that town. I can't stand her being even in that—that vicinity."

"She's a swell girl, Bill."

"She's a—lady! I can't stand it, I tell you. Her having to live in the neighborhood of that—that other woman!"

Struck me kind of strange, him so aggravated about her, but the last three passages never standing by in the locks long enough to pay her a visit.

He said thickly, "I wish to heaven I could do something for her!"

I said, anxious to help, "Well, why don't you take her out of there, Bill? She'd make a damn good—make a swell cook, I mean, an'—I mean, I always thought you and her—why don't you marry her?"

Every time I opened my mouth I put my foot in it. His eyes liked to've knocked me overboard. And there was that finger in his collar again, the veins laced out on his forehead and that hell's fire flush on his face. For a second I thought I was in for another choking, but he didn't. Turning abrupt on his heel, he walked away, and a little while later I saw the lights in his cabin window and I knew he was down there in those books again. Me, I wished he'd stick to his normal meals; it was gettin' pretty tough, workin' those boats with Bible Bill. But that was another storm signal.

JUST the same I wasn't prepared for what happened on that third run back to Buffalo. If I remember it right, we dropped the lumber this side of Albany at a place called Fonda, and then cut up into the Oswego branch, haulin' crushed stone. It was gettin' along August when we started back toward Lake Erie after a grain shipment. Up there on the Oswego Canal Bill had calmed down some, but startin' back on the big ditch goin' west he gets bees in his bonnet worse than ever.

I was surprised when he give the order to tie up at Lock Twenty-eight. It's just east of Swillberg, remember, within shoutin' distance of that red-headed queen and her tavern. You know how the canal locks are worked? A lock is really nothin' but an elevator that lifts boats up and down from one water level to another at a place where the watercourse drops off and otherwise there'd be a falls. Some locks there's a lift as high as forty feet. I don't recall exactly how many there was on the old Erie, but there was a heap of them; I'd expect the average lift was fifteen or twenty feet.

Say you're enterin' the locks from the lower level. Your barge slips in through the gates; you cast off the towline, and the mules scramble up the steep grade to wait for you at the top; the gates close behind you and you're shut in the lock. Okay then, the lock-tender opens a sluice and the water boils in from the upper level, boomin' and churnin' under your boat. Takes maybe ten minutes for the lock to fill; gradually the barge rises until it's abreast the upper level.

Then the upper gates swing open; you

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hitch onto the towline, and the mules pull you out into th' canal. If you got a string of boats you have to go back an' fetch the others—some of the old locks would take only one at a time, maybe—they got to empty the lock so's you can come in from the lower level again. If you're comin' from the other direction—from a high level to a low—the process is reverse.

Approachin' Lock Twenty-eight from the east, we're on the low water level. The big wooden gates loom up ahead, thirty feet high. On either side of the gates the banks slope up steep, and where you enter the lock you pass between narrow walls of big, gray granite blocks.

Top of the gates there's an iron railing and a catwalk; old Uncle Dick Tenney, the lock-tender, is waitin' up there, ready to shove the heavy wooden boom that swings the gates open. He's given us the all-clear signal, and there's still time in th' twilight for our boats to pass through, but Bible Bill don't give him the toot to open up. Instead, Bill waves at me to steer hard a'starboard, and we swing over alongside the towpath. I hear him shout at Willie to unhitch the team, and then he comes aft.

"We're tyin' up, Low-Bridge. I'm goin' up to have supper with Lorna. You an' Willie stand by. We pull out first thing in the morning."

Pretty soon he's all scrubbed and spruced, clean collar, necktie an' coat, climbin' the high bank to the gate-house. Lorna comes running out to meet him, and everything looks hunky dory from what I can see. But tied up there in front of that lock I can't see much. The gates loom up like a dam, understand, an' all the activity is on the other side. That is to say, the gate-house is up there aloft, and Swillberg lies just beyond where the canal stretches off on the upper level. I can't see the town, but I can hear it. Distant echoes of boaters yellin' to each other. Horns tootin' as some barge from the west comes in. After a while the faint strains of dance music. Me, I get restless.

THE mules are grazing along the bank and fireflies are swoopin' in the dark and Willie's fishin' for carp up on the bow and Shanghai is asleep atop the cabin roof on the *Exodus*. It's a soft, warm summer night, and I haven't took a shore leave in a month. Well, why not? There's a light in the window of the gate-house—why should Bible Bill ask everybody else to bunk in early? Besides, I've got a thirst. I never signed no pledge, did I? Tell you the truth, I was getting blasted sick of all work an' no play under a guy who ran his boats like a navy fleet an' figured every day was Sunday.

"Willie, I'm goin' to bunk in."

The kid knows darn well I'm not, or I wouldn't have on a clean pair of dungarees; but he also knows he better not tell. Over on the towpath, I cut into the bushes, and climbin' the grade I steer a wide course around the gate-house. Off the path it's dark as pitch. Bill, I figure, will stick around with Lorna for a couple of hours, and I'll try to get back before moonrise. Any kind of luck, I can sneak a beer in Swillberg and be back aboard the *Leviticus* without Bill's being the wiser.

Yeah, but I'm the one who was wiser when I got back. I'll tell you. Must have been nine o'clock when I slipped into Mother Damnation's for a friendly glass that night. The place was goin' like a blast furnace when I got there.

Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here! They were all there, for a fact—Eagercheek and Bartlett and Big Jim Ritter and Old Man Widdle off the *Snob*. I saw Slugs Jeterson's barge tied up on the opposite bank, and Professor Murgatroyd was on hand, too, painting a four-masted schooner on Three-Fingered Jack O'Brion's chest. The bar was jammed, an' you couldn't have cut through the dance-floor smoke with a meat cleaver. Upstairs there was the rattle of dice. Thinkin' it might be better to keep clear of the barroom, I ducked across to the stairway an' slunk up to the second floor.

I didn't want the dice room, but there was a long hall, see, and off this hall

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some private dining rooms where you could quench a thirst without some butter-in bein' nosey. Well, I tried these doors, but it was a full house that night, and then at the hall there was a door I didn't try. My hand touched th' knob; then jumped back of its own accord. There was someone in that room, too. But listen!

"Take it easy, dearie!" That was Mother Damnation's voice, kind of jeery and mocking. "Maybe I ain't no spring chicken, but I got feelings, I got pride. You got no call to come rampagin' at me 'count of that little chit of a girl. Lady, is she? But who are you to talk? Tell me that! Who are you?"

That's what I was wonderin', myself, and I stretched an ear at the door, curious. Honest, the man's voice that came through the wood, faint above the whisky quartet singing downstairs, almost batted me over backwards. Thick and fierce and steamy, it was, an' dark as passion.

"Whatever I am, it's nothing to do with that girl! I won't have you lying to her—even speaking to her! By heaven, you won't!"

Mother Damnation gave a harsh laugh. "Won't I?"

"No! And as for me ever coming in with you, even if—"

MOTHER DAMNATION interrupted in a tone so scathing it seemed to saw through the door-panel, "So I'm not good enough, eh? I'm not a lady, eh? Pretty high an' mighty talk, it appears to me, comin' from you! After what I know!"

"You can't know!" Bible Bill burst out. "You can't prove!"

"Can't I?" the woman's voice went up. "Say, I knew it the minute I spotted you. Sure. Recognized you straight off, my Holy Joe. You've got pretty uppity since I seen you last. Pretty fine an' uppity, considerin'. But I wouldn't have said nothin' if you hadn't barged in here with all this talk about runnin' me off the ditch. Now wait till she hears!"

"If you tell such a lie to that girl—"

"Me? Lie? You can't talk to me like that, my fine lad. You can't pull that holy face on me! I know what you're hidin' behind that collar an' tie! Come out from behind it, big boy! *Take off that collar an' tie!*"

She said it low in emphasis, and I heard Bible Bill gasp, "My God!" only it didn't sound like prayer.

Mother Damnation's words harshened, like she was chewing them through her teeth. "So maybe you won't be so quick now to run me off the ditch! Maybe you won't be so quick to say I ain't a lady! Wouldn't sound so good, would it? If this canal was to learn about who—"

"Quiet!" Bible Bill broke her off. There was a scurry behind the door. "Don't, for God's sake. Someone's out there listening!"

Me, I was too scared to budge. But they didn't open the door; I heard the woman move across the room, sounded like she closed a window.

"Who'd be listening?" she wanted to know. "Who'd be out there on the roof, hey? Well, I ain't exactly flattered by the way you're takin' on. I've seen happier reunions. But get this, kiddo. You'll come in with me on this deal, or I'll shout what I know about you so loud they'll hear it the whole smelly length of this canal!"

Bible Bill said in a groan, "You can't do this to me! You can't!"

Mother Damnation said harshly, "The ditch will be interested."

For what seemed to me a long time there wasn't a sound behind the door. Then ice tinkled in a glass. The woman's words sort of tinkled like the ice.

"Warm, ain't it, dearie? There's some Scotch there on the table. That's right, be a sport—can't you see you're hurtin' my feelings? I told you I'd get you down off that high horse."

I beat it. I had to get air. Out in the night it made my head spin. I bumped into Slugs Jeterson on the towpath, and he snarled, "Why the hell don't you look where you're goin'?"

I sneaked on down through the darkness, and skirted the locks an' the gate-house where I'd thought Bill was, an'

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climbed down the embankment to our boats. Some things surprise you so much your head goes blank. I remember sayin' to myself, "Well, boys will be boys!" It made me kind of cynical like. But what could that red headed queen have on him? What could she spill about him that he wouldn't want his girl or the ditch to know? I must've been mistaken about the voices. I couldn't believe it. Not even when at midnight, sittin' up on deck behind the mule cabin, I heard Bill's footsteps on the towpath blundering through the dark, and knew he was drunk as a lord.

The storm broke when we got to Buffalo.

CHAPTER VI

VIGILANTES' VISIT

I WAS on the afterdeck washin' a singlet when the five men came aboard. All day we'd been at the grain docks, and I'd been mighty glad to see the last ton in the hold and the hatches down. Bible Bill had been tough. Ever since leavin' Swillberg he'd been hell on wheels. There'd been no talkin' to the man.

Most of the time he'd stuck down in his cabin, leavin' me to do the deck work. I guess Satan couldn't have recruited any cheap help in Bill's crew. This was the first chance I'd had to breathe. I was thinkin' how I'd seen him comin' aboard that night, rollin' like a ship in bad weather. How I'd heard him pour a bucket of water over his head, and how he'd called all hands on deck before the roosters, and we'd pulled out for Buffalo crack of dawn, faster through the locks than we'd ever gone before. I was thinkin' a lot of other things, too. You can bet your life I hadn't dared say a word of what I thought to Bible Bill.

There was a step on the deck behind me, an' I jumped up, palmin' my chewin' tobacco.

"That you, Low-Bridge?"

It wasn't Bible Bill. There was five of them shadowy in the dark, and at first I thought they was bumboat pirates, till one edged forward with a lantern an' I saw the gray, stringy beard of Cap'n Eagercheek. Old Man Widdle's there beside him. And I made out Cockeyed Ben Bartlett off the *Sweetheart* and Big Jim Ritter, and there's a fat man with three stomachs and a chin like a bib—Jonah Mapes off the *Angel P.*

"'Lo, boys!" I was near to astonished. "When'd you boaters get in?" I knew Eagercheek had been comin' behind us fast freight, but I'd thought the rest of them was tied up back at Swillberg.

Eagercheek snapped, ignorin' my question, "Where's Bible Bill?"

"For-ard." I jerked a thumb toward his lighted cabin. "But he won't want to see nobody. When he goes below he—"

"Huh!" Old Man Widdle squirted a splash of tobacco juice. "Reckon he'll want to see us."

"We all of us hauled for leather outa Swillberg tryin' to catch up with him," Cap'n Eagercheek said gruffly. "He'll want to see us, all right. Come on, boys."

It was kind of sinister the way they bunched together and went forward to Bill's cabin hatch, crowded down the companion without so much as a by-your-leave. I followed 'em down, despite I knew I'd catch it. Bill, at a table in the middle of the floor, had jumped up to face his callers, and he looked plenty mad at the intrusion. He chucked the book he was reading into his bunk, and in the light from the oil lamp over his head his cheekbones went a reddish tinge.

"Low-Bridge, how many times have I got to tell you—"

"Never mind the formality, Bill," Cap'n Eagercheek cut in. He waved a hand to distribute the other boaters around the cabin; moved up to take a chair at the table. "This here visit couldn't wait for an invite. We been chasin' you eighty miles to see you."

Big Jim Ritter rumbled, "You'll want to hear this." He reached up past my head to slide the door over the hatch.

"Somethin' you ought to know," Jonah Mapes piped up, slopping his bulk against a wall and looking around the cabin. "Say,

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Bill, ain't there no spittoons on your boats where a man can—"

"I don't allow tobacco on my boats!"

The fat man sighed, "My God—"

"Nor profanity either!" Bill glared.

"Damn it." Big Jim crowded into a corner, chewing an unlighted stogie, "can't you lay off the religious stuff once in a while? We're Erie boaters, not missionaries! How the hell can we talk to you if you keep sounding off like a psalm-singer all the time?"

"I'll have to ask you not to curse around here, Ritter!"

"Didn't I tell you?" Ben Bartlett cocked his eye at a *Prepare To Meet Your Maker* motto pinned over the bunk. "Didn't I tell you Bill wouldn't have nothin' to do with this?"

Cap'n Eagercheek snapped, "It's a man of high moral calibre we need for this here job. Bill's our man. Leave me do the talkin'."

"Talk, then, and quick!" Bible Bill rapped out. You could see he didn't like those boaters jamming up his cabin. They was rival captains for one thing, and for another, he must've been anxious about what was behind this call.

I can see it in my mind's eye to this day, Cap'n Eagercheek with his thumbs in his suspenders, tilted back, waitin' for a mule to stop brayin' in a cabin astern; the others starin' grim-eyed at Bill.

Eagercheek said slowly. "It's about Mother Damnation."

I SAW Bill's fingers grab a white-knuckled clutch on the edge of the table. He had to wet his lips. He said stiffly, "If you're referring to that dance-hall woman back at Swillberg—"

"Nobody else."

"If you'd believe anything she'd say—"

"We don't. That's just the point."

Bill passed a hand over his forehead. "Then what?"

Cap'n Eagercheek leaned forward in his chair. "Bill, you lost some tackle off your boats last June when you was tied up at Swillberg."

"I did." Bill's voice sounded queer.

"So'd I, a week after," Cap'n Eagercheek growled. "Brand new hawser I'd bought in Albany. Cockeyed Ben, here, he had a hundred dollars worth of beef swiped off the *Sweetheart*. Widdle lost some harness there. So's Jonah Mapes had stuff stole off the *Angel P.* Where do we lose this stuff? I'll tell you. Every time we tie up within' spittin' distance of that woman's tavern at Swillberg!"

Bible Bill straightened up tall. "I told the woman to repent her ways, and you who patronize her place all gave me the laugh. But the Lord punishes the unrighteous, and her judgment will come. The way of the transgressor is hard."

"Maybe," Cap'n Eagercheek agreed, "us boaters are gettin' a little tired of her piracy. It's this way, Bill. We ain't got nothin' on her about all this stolen gear. She's hand in glove with th' canal politicians. Go to court, and we wouldn't get nowhere—you know how these town lawyers take us boaters. But it seems like now it's time we got to give th' Lord's vengeance a hand. This time, Bill, it's murder."

That's a hard word anywhere, and it dropped like a bolt of iron, unexpected out of that canal-boat captain's beard. There was a long, dead pause while the shadows on the wall stood still and the boaters in their work shirts an' dungarees an' sea-boots posed starin' sternly at Bill, and Bill in his white shirt an' collar an' Sunday-like clothes stared back.

They was tough, hard characters, all of them. Grizzled old Eagercheek; an' Ben Bartlett looking sideways with his cock eye; an' Old Man Widdle gnarled up with rheumatics; an' Big Jim Ritter, all muscles and tattoo; an' fat, sloppy Jonah Mapes with his tobacco juice a-runnin'. They was canallers first an' last—sunburnt, work-knuckled, rough from years of fightin' for a living up and down the ditch. Yeah, and ordinarily Bible Bill, big-fisted, wide-shouldered, could stand up to any of them. Ordinarily.

But right then, after what Eagercheek

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said, he looked like he was having trouble with his legs. He gripped the edge of the table, like he needed support. He ran his finger around his collar. He drank a glass of water, like a speaker who's forgotten his speech.

"Knew you'd be shocked," Cap'n Eagercheek growled. "It was my driver boy, Sam."

Eagercheek slammed the table with his fist. "He was a good driver, Sam was. Not a better mule skinner on the towpath. He got it at Swillberg, see? Right there near Mother Damnation's place, night before last. If you recollect, it was dark with no moon. I left Sam standin' watch on my boats, an' went up to the tavern with my wife for a glass. When we get back to my boats around midnight we find my cabin's been robbed. Money box gone. There's been a fight from the looks. No sign of Sam."

Eagercheek paused to pull a breath an' spit his whiskers out of his mouth. "Well, at first I thought Sam had done it. Way the stuff was kicked around, it looked like the fight's a fake. I went around Swillberg huntin' Sam. Just before morning I find him floatin' in the canal. Dead as a buoy. Back of his head bashed in."

Bible Bill said in his throat, "That's terrible."

Cap'n Eagercheek rasped, "It's murder."

"You got the police?"

"Police nothin'. You know about those bluecoats. You know what they give us boaters goin' through their towns. Side of the railroads, most of 'em. Those Swillberg cops would say Sam walked overboard in the dark. He was down between my boats like he might have. Hit his head on a deck-bitt, they'd say. Want evidence the woman had croaked him. Evidence? There ain't any. Just what I'm telling you. Anyhow, the woman would buy off the police."

"She's got a pot of money," Big Jim Ritter snarled. "Those as have money never gets hanged."

"Women," Jonah Mapes piped out, "is never hanged anyways."

CAP'N EAGERCHEEK stood up, his blue eyes glinting and his mouth mighty grim in his beard. "Bill," he said, "we're goin' to handle this ourselves. Same way we handled that canal pirate who stabbed a boater at Lockport a few years back. Same way we handled those river pirates at Albany."

Bill's lips fluttered and stammered as if the tongue in his mouth had turned to a hot potato. He gulped. He got out, "You mean?"

"I mean we're gonna take th' Law in our own hands. Sam was only a mule boy, but he was a canalman, an' it's up to us boaters to settle this thing. I'd of come to you first off, only you pulled out that mornin' before I'd found the body. I rounded up these other captains I could trust, an' they feel same as me about it.

"We're goin' back to Swillberg an' get that woman, see? All of us together. Leave here first thing in th' morning, we'll be there tomorrow midnight. It'll look like we're tied up before th' locks. We'll fetch her out to my boat. Hold the trial down in my cabin. The five of us will be jury. Won't anybody have to know." Cap'n Eagercheek spread his leathery hands. "I reckon it won't be the first time a woman's been found floatin' in th' canal."

Myself, I was remembering about the Albany pirates. Anybody that's smothered to death, then thrown in the water, the police can't tell they wasn't drowned. They'd draw lots, an' do it with a pillow or something.

Cap'n Eagercheek's eyes were on me. He said, mild-like, "By th' way, Low-Bridge, I guess you'll have to sit in th' jury, too." It made my throat go dry, and I wished I hadn't come down into the cabin.

Big Jim Ritter scowled at the floor, rumbling, "Anybody that knew about it an' talked afterward would make a hell of a mistake."

"Now, Jim, don't be suspicious," Cap'n Eagercheek said. "We're all boaters, here. All of us has the same common interest. That's why I figured Bill would want to

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be in on this. Who'd be a better judge?"

"Judge?" I wish you could have seen Bill's face.

"We had a meeting, Bill. If we're gonna have a trial we got to have a judge. Kind of looks, Bill, like we've 'lected you."

"Me?" the word was so low you could hardly hear it.

"Why, ain't you the best eddicated captain on the ditch? Who's fought more to clean up th' Erie since it was dug? You got religion, too. Sure, an' ever since that woman set up shop at Swillberg you been swearin' she'd have to go. Well, now's your chance to do something about it. We want you to judge th' trial. Tomorrow midnight. At Swillberg."

I had a mental picture of it, because I'd heard my old man tell of how they'd handled that pirate once at Lockport. A cabin aboard a canal boat, the hatch shut an' the windows covered over. Masked men standin' against the wall. Someone with a rifle guardin' the deck above. A candle on the table, an' the prisoner tied to a chair. A low voice readin' the accusation, an' the prisoner pleadin' an' lyin' an' squirmin', then the masked judge pronouncin' the sentence. "The jury votes guilty."

I could imagine that big red headed woman tryin' to kick loose and get free, an' Bible Bill mumbling the verdict. After while there'd be a muffled splash. I could see Bible Bill was imagining the same thing.

His face was shiny with sweat, bathing jaws an' throat, wilting his collar. Eagercheek an' Widdle an' Big Jim an' Cockeyed Ben an' the fat man were lookin' at him, waiting. If he didn't join up with them after all his preachin' an' ranting, they'd think he was a plain, cowardly hypocrite. If he did join up . . .

They couldn't understand what he was stallin' for. They didn't know where he'd been the night before last at Swillberg. They didn't know he an' Mother Damnation had some kind of a deal. He must've been remembering that just then. Lord, his face was a sight.

"GENTLEMEN!" He blurted it out, like all the sudden he'd recalled the lines of his speech. "Gentlemen, I—I can't go into this with you. Not right now. Not tomorrow night. I can't sit judge for that woman's murder trial. Not tomorrow midnight I can't."

Nobody said anything. It was like Bible Bill was on trial then. Those five captains stared at him, wanting explanation.

"It's the wheat!" Bill blurted. "Don't you see? I'm loaded! Grain shipment! Got to go through express! I can't tie up at Swillberg for a night. Rush haul all the way."

His eyes ran around, appealing. "Look, boys, I'm near to bankrupt this season. This's my first big haul. Express to Albany. Rush haul to meet a big grain ship there. If I'm late—an' the grain's bad, too—no, no, I can't take the chance! If this stuff sprouts on me an' I have to shovel off, I lose the contract. Why'd this have to come up now?"

He wiped his forehead wildly. "Ask Low-Bridge. Ask Low-Bridge if we ain't got to move full speed. I couldn't stop at Swillberg! The next trip!" He leaned at Cap'n Eagercheek, almost shouting. "Yes, yes, the next trip! After I've delivered this grain! I'll go into this with you then! I'll do it on the way comin' back!"

Cap'n Eagercheek took off his sea-cap and polished his bald spot with his palm. "Why, Bill," he said mildly, "it ain't nothin' to get so het up about. You're haulin' fast freight, then you're haulin' fast freight. We understand how it is about grain. Don't worry about it."

"You'll wait for me to—to come back from Albany?"

Cap'n Eagercheek scratched a minute in his beard. "No, Bill," he said thoughtfully, "the only way to get somethin' done is to get it done. I reckon one of us will have to be judge. Just you an' Low-Bridge keep this all under your hat, understand. There won't be no Mother Damnation swimmin' out to meet you on your way back."

After they were gone I didn't know

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what to say. I could hear their boots fading up the dock, an' Cap'n Eagercheek was whistlin' something soft and sad like *Just Before the Battle, Mother*. I felt kind of sickly, kind of wilted. The sad music faded out, an' I turned to go topside, afraid to look at Bible Bill.

He nailed me by the shoulder just as I started up the ladder. "Low-Bridge! We're clearin' out early! I'll want you on deck at four, an' Willie workin' all the mules! We're haulin' grain like it's never been hauled on this ditch! I don't want no boats in front of me this run!

"You heard me," he bawled as I gaped at him. "What in the name of heaven are you standing there like a fool for? Get topside! Make sure our lines are ready to clear! Get out of here!"

CHAPTER VII

FAST HAUL

I WON'T forget that grain haul out of Buffalo. From the minute we pulled away from the docks, four mules hitched tandem on the line, I won't forget a minute of it. The city was still in darkness, the other boaters asleep, the canal black as ink when we pulled away.

The *Genesis, Exodus* an' *Leviticus,* loaded to the waterline, was ghostly in the gray of fading night. Wet with dew, the decks reflected glistening lantern-gleams, an' the damp tarpaulins over the hatches sent up a mist. It'd been one of those dead hot August nights when the steam rose thick on the canal.

The docks weren't yet awake, and the caulks of the mule-shoes, gashing up splinters from the planking as the team took up slack, the crack of Willie's whip, the groan of stretching rope an' Bible Bill's shouts from the bow made quite a rumpus.

"Pour it into 'em, Willie! Give it to the rascals! Lay on! Lay on! What's the matter with that team? Give 'em the whip, those black lazy devils! We're movin' out of here!"

Those prize black mules, Matthew, Mark, Luke an' John, they'd never heard Bible Bill a-yellin' like that, and Willie hadn't neither. All five of 'em laid their ears back an' showed the whites of their eyes. I could hear Willie pumpin' the whip, a jangle of harness, clatter of hoofs as the mules stretched the rope. Slow, we moved away from the dock; I leaned on the tiller to shove us out into mid channel. A dock watchman swung his lantern to look at us, and I saw the surprise on his face when he seen who we was. A couple of early freight wallopers give us a hail. The mules went into a trot, and we was under way.

That Buffalo canal basin was crowded with boats, which meant considerable juggling till we got into open country. Ordinary start, we wouldn't be clear of the city till after sunup, but we didn't make any ordinary get-away that morning. Somewhere in the basin we slid past the *Sweetheart,* the *Snob,* the *Angel P.* and Cap'n Eagercheek's tow. Their cabin windows were dark; an' I watched in apprehension, afraid those boaters might have an eye on us, an' more than relieved to see them go astern.

We went past the brick walls of big dark mills, warehouses an' factory buildings; passed under a great steel bridge; it was still night when we hit the open towpath. We were moving, that's a fact. Water churned under the stern, foaming like beer in our wake, an' I could hear the slop of waves against the canal bank. I should say we were goin' all of five miles an hour.

Five miles an hour, you laugh. What's five miles an hour in this day an' age of railroads, ocean liners an' airplanes? Well, let me tell you it was top speed in those days on the Erie Canal. Record breakin' speed on a grain haul pulled by mules with your barges loaded to the sinking point. We had to work to make time like that. Work like the devil! There's the mules to be changed. You got to jump ashore an' carry the tow-line across the decks of any boats moored alongside the bank. Overhaul a slow freighter, and it's

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all hands on deck for a close squeeze. There's locks to go through with plenty of hitching an' unhitching, lines to be handled, hawsers to be made fast.

Yeah, and cargoes can take a list and you got to go down the hold an' shovel. Maybe a seam springs a leak, an' you got to pump bilge. Then take a town like Lockport, where there's one lock after another, more ropes to be pulled than on a sailin' vessel. Or a town like Batavia where your towline somehow gets tangled in the lines of a dredge anchored to the bank. Or a stretch where Matthew throws a shoe, an' you have to swing in and drag Paul out of the mule cabin for replacement. Five miles an hour is breath-takin' when things happen like that on a canal, and all those things happened to us that haul.

BIBLE BILL was like a man who'd lost his senses. One minute he's on the bow hollerin' at Willie and the mules. Next minute he comes aft to yell at me. "Have you got to write your name all over the canal? Look at that wake! Can't you keep an even course?"

He didn't say anything about our visit from the vigilantes. He couldn't stand still long enough. All morning he was up and down the decks, fuming, shouting, raging impatient at every delay—drive, drive, drive! About every half hour he'd open a hatch to take a look at a grain-hold. Honest, you'd have thought we was haulin' a load of gunpowder that any minute was going to explode.

It was too hot a day for that sort of capering. The sun came up fierce enough to give every dog ashore the rabies. That canal was like coffee. You could see the rocks cracking along the bank, cattle panting under wilted trees, an' there weren't any fishermen dozing over the docks. August heat lay like a smother across the countryside. It was a scorcher, I tell you—one of those days when the sun-slick off the brown water hurt your eyes. Dust drifted back from the towpath in yellow, sneezy clouds; the decks ahead of me was blistering their paint, and I was goin' to have asthma from the fields of duckweed an' goldenrod.

I'd have give my soul for a beer that noon. Just leaning on the tiller had me sweating. The mules up ahead were in a lather, an' Willie's boots had begun to lag; Bible Bill popped out of his cabin to shout for better time. "Feed 'em the whip, boy! Lay it onto them!" He'd lean overside, waving his fists. "Get on! Get on! We're not haulin' cement, we got grain in these holds! Lay it on!"

Enterin' a town, we'd start passin' traffic; the sight of a barge ahead seemed to drive Bill crazy. He wouldn't let up till we'd overhauled the boat, and some of those captains, sittin' out under deck awnings, looked at Bill with their mouths open, astonished. There'd be a lot of yelling as they'd drop their lines to let us by.

"Hey, Bill, tryin' to beat th' *Robert E. Lee?*"

"Take it easy, Bill, you'll get th' Canal Commission after you! Them waves of yours are washin' out the banks!"

"What's your cargo, big boy? Dynamite?"

"Aimin' to get yourself a sunstroke? Where's the fire?"

Most of the yellin' was good-humored, but Bible Bill didn't let go with any banter on his part. I guess he was haulin' dynamite, so to speak, and I wondered what those boaters would think if they knew what I knew.

A couple of times when Bill came aft, his face drippin', shirt pasted to his back, collar soaked to a rag an' hair over his eyes, I was tempted to speak, but I didn't. He was like a boiler that day. A boiler gettin' up hotter and hotter steam with no safety valve. For weeks all those things inside him had been adding pressure: the canal goin' stale—business troubles—all that about Lorna—whatever had come over him that time at Albany.

It all seemed to go back to Mother Damnation. She'd put the heat under him somehow, I knew—and a murder to top it off had him fit to be tied. I kept my

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mouth shut, you bet your life. He'd taken to chokin' me every time I opened it, and that day I figured I'd better mind my own business. I was scared of the man that afternoon.

I was scared of him; and I was scared of those other boaters who was comin' somewhere behind us, those men who was on their way to Swillberg to try Mother Damnation for murder. That's why I didn't quit, see? I'd have jumped the boat at Lockport or Batavia or somewhere, but it might've looked funny to Bill, and I didn't dare. He might've told those other boaters that I'd quit. You can't run out on canalmen, leastwise not canalmen like they were in the old days. After I'd heard what I'd heard, it wouldn't do for anything I did to look funny.

SHANGHAI come aft with a pan of grub about two o'clock, Bill havin' ordered me not to leave the tiller. That Chink was a wise one. His pock-marked face was always blank an' you couldn't see anything behind his slant eyes, only you always figured he was in the know. But that day his face was blank and his slant eyes empty, an' he only looked at me. He gave a little shrug an' padded away. I saw he wasn't in the know.

Willie came aboard for lunch while we're goin' through a lock. Bill was on the towpath, larrupin' the team. Willie was sniveling, head to foot plastered with sweat and dust, weeping he was lame. He didn't know anything either.

Middle of the afternoon we run into a blind, soakin' thunder shower. Couldn't see a tow passin' us on the opposite bank. For an hour we drove through the roarin' smother, Bill rampaging fore and aft in the lightning flashes, hollering at me to fetch extra tarpaulins, the hatches were leaky an' the damp in the holds would sprout the grain. The sun burned through the clouds like a furnace door, the afternoon blazed hotter than before, the decks sent up steam clouds, the tarpaulins had to be whipped off. On the towpath Willie and the mules was up to their hocks in mud. But we were gettin' across New York State.

Late afternoon there's Rochester, in spite of the delays. A lot of bridges an' that narrow aqueduct which spanned the Genesee River there; Bill working a squeeze to get us past Slugs Jeterson's boats comin' west and at the same time overhaul a slow boat headin' East. It didn't cool him off to wait for a lifting bridge an' some trolley cars. There was a boat in the distance ahead, an' he was in a lather to overtake her.

We caught her in th' country beyond Rochester, and I got reason to recollect that overhaul. Get a picture of her there ahead of us in the evening. An old, waterlogged cattle barge, waddling along behind one mule, the smell of her drifting astern like to stifle your nose, and her name barely readable in faded paint—the *Kathleen O'Noulaheen, Ohio.*

Five miles an hour we come up behind her, but the *Kathleen O'Noulaheen* don't want to move over. Bill's up there blowin' his horn at the weedy cattleman, but she don't give way, hoggin' the channel midstream. I get the signal to cut in between her and the bank; but if she pulls inshore on us, we're going to get pinched off and scraped against the towpath. Willie has to slow the mules to a walk, for fear of tanglin' with the cattleman's driver. Our lead boat comes abreast of the cattle boat's stern without much leeway to spare.

"Pull over!" Bible Bill roars at the Ohio boat's steersman, a big red-faced lug who's lounging with his arms draped over the tiller, grinning at our approach. "Hard a-port an' give way! Can't you hear my horn? Hail your captain to drop that towline! We want to pass!"

"I can hear ye all right," the answer booms back in Killarney brogue. "Sure, an' I can't hail the captain to drop the towrope, because I'm the captain. Who'd ye be, now, that's orderin' the *Kathleen O'Noulaheen* to make way in such insolent tones?"

"You can see who I am," Bill shouted across, "if you'll read my name on the

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stern when we get by. You're holding up fast freight, mister! Pull to port with that cattle scow and drop your line, I say.

"Willie!" he wheeled, bellowin' through cupped hands. "Get abreast that mule skinner and tell him to give you slack! We got right of way!"

"An' the *Kathleen O'Noulaheen* gives way to nobody," the cattleman's skipper bawled. Dropping his tiller, he darted to the hatch of his after cabin. "Hey, boys," he yelled down, "come topside an' look. It's Judgment Day that's overhaulin' us! Sure, an' it wants to overtake us an' pass, with Gabriel, himself, on th' bow!"

It was a tough looking crew that tumbled up out of that cattler's hold. As tough a batch of hands as I'd yet to see on the ditch. I could hear the squeal of pigs an' steers lowin' and stampin' below decks, and those men brought up a smell with them rich as a stockyard. I didn't like the look of it, for the lot of them was drunk as skunks. Oaths, jeers an' catcalls come like a shower of rotten tomatoes over at Bill, and Bill's face went purple as if it was splashed with juice.

Leaning over the bow, he shook his fist at the Irish boater. "Make way with your dirty boat! Make way! You know the rules of overhaulin' and you'll let us by or find out! Did you hear me order you to drop that towline?"

"The back of me hand to ya, ye scut!" the Irishman went shrill. "For two cents I'd board ye with me boys an' bend a crowbar over yer black Scotch skull!"

ON THE towpath Willie had come even with the other driver boy; there was a scuffle in the dust as they struck at each other with their whips. A bottle came sailing over, crashed on the deck of our lead boat. The Irisher shoved his tiller to pinch us against the bank; I gave the rudder a heave to bend us in; I could tell every inch of depth in that canal, an' I knew if I steered in much closer our bottom boards would be gutted on rock. Bill, seein' what the Irisher was up to, went black in the face.

"Mister, if I had a minute to spare I'd take you on! You and your whole crew, single-handed! I'll sink you sure as heaven if you come a-beam! You hauled a long way to get that rotten scow in this canal, mister; it would be a shame if you and your pigs were to drown in it!"

"Be damned, an' I'll scuttle ya, ye pie-faced mistake! No sissy in a white collar can push aside the *Kathleen O'Noulaheen!* The devil fly away with ye before I ram ye to the bottom!"

Man, it looked like an old-time scrap, with Bill leaning far overside, fisting an' thundering at the cattle boat, and the Irishman swinging her over to catch us amidships. I reached into a box and picked out a hammer. Wasn't ten feet of canal between us and that big scow; Willie had managed to get our team around the inside of the Ohio mule, an' I heard Bill shout at him to go on.

But the Irishman's driver boy had raced across the towpath to take a half hitch with his line around a mooring post so when our lead boat nosed into the hawser it would hold us fast. I was thinkin' I was going to get my head cracked open. That batch of cattle scum was spoiling for a battle, wavin' pitchforks and grappling irons, crowdin' amidships and anxious to jump over at us. Only I hadn't counted on Bible Bill.

Up there on the bow of the *Genesis* he was ready. *Umph!* we nosed into the cattler's hawser. I could see the rope climb up the bow as it tightened between the mooring post and the cattle barge to our port. Bill bent over like a jacknife, an' when he snapped up straight there was a fire ax in his fists. *Whack!* He swung overside so far his arms seemed about five feet long. The ax-head flashed down. One chop, like that! He caught that Irishman's towrope at the waterline, and that big hawser parted like a cut rubber band.

The cattle barge lost way as we slid ahead, and that red-eyed Irisher squalled like a stabbed ox. "Cut me adrift, will ye? Part me line? I'll get ye for that, ye bilge-swabber. So help me, I will!" Hard

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a-starboard he heaved on his tiller, fighting to jam us; but I held so close to the bank as I could without ripping our bottoms out, and with Willie lashing the mules we picked up speed, and the cattler's drift wasn't fast enough to get us. I dodged a bombardment of whisky bottles as we slid past the Irisher's bow; then the *O'Noulaheen* was fair astern.

Bunched forward, the cattle crew waved us goodbye with pitchforks, hatchets and irons as Bill came running aft on the catwalk, returning compliments. I was plenty relieved to notice those cattlemen were too stewed to jump ashore and footrace up the towpath after us. There was some wild yelling as their skipper swung offshore to keep her from going aground; then his crimson face was like a headlight at the bow of his barge, and for another quarter mile his howls followed us through the evening.

"I'll meet ye again, Gabriel! Ye'll find out about Judgment Day!"

We went on down the canal in a blue haze of dusk. Judgment Day! Well, I was thinking. Five miles ahead and around the bend there was Swillberg an' Mother Damnation an' Lorna an' Lock Twenty-eight. Full speed ahead, we could clear the locks before night; have a long, open stretch to travel, and be well on our way to Albany. But if another delay should stall us before we cleared those locks! Well, then we'd have to tie up at Swillberg for the night, and with what I knew about Bible Bill an' that tavern queen! And with that rip-snortin' Irisher behind us! And with those five boaters banded for a murder trial, like the Ku Klux Klan bringin' up the rear! Uh-huh, I was thinking that if anything should tie us up at Swillberg there might be a Judgment Day on top of us at that.

So listen. Rounding that bend into Swillberg, there was the tavern roof in sight, the white lock-gates beyond, all clear ahead on the canal. The stillness of August dusk was on the place. The water was like steaming black glass and a thin fog was weaving across the picture of the banks, more peaceful than usual with only a couple of barges moored and people indoors wilting after a scorcher.

Music came to meet us through the quiet—just a song at twilight!—familiar strains of *The Garbage Man's Daughter*. I hoped Bill, who wasn't on deck, wouldn't hear it, and I shoved us out for mid-channel, anxious to give that tavern dock a wide berth.

Then Bill comes busting out of a cabin on the *Exodus;* races aft. My jaw sagged at the look of him, for all those things I'd been thinking must've been in his mind, too, and I could see them in his eyes.

"Take her in, Low-Bridge! We're tying up!"

"At Swillberg!"

"Didn't you hear what I said? Steer in! We're goin' to dock!"

I gasped, "That cattle boat will be comin' behind us!"

"Do as you're ordered!" he bellowed at me. "It's the wheat! The *Exodus* is takin' water in her forward hold! She'll spring her seams and founder! We got to come alongside those dumps and shovel off!" He leaned on the deckhouse, wiping his temples. He looked seasick. "If we work fast maybe we can get clear. We can't take a chance with this grain cargo, Low-Bridge. We got to shovel off and get through!"

In the foggy twilight the singing had stopped. I saw a dash of red bounce from the tavern porch and go kiting across the tow-path. I heard the far-off splash. Mother Damnation was in swimming.

CHAPTER VIII

MEET THE IRISH

I DID some fast calculating. There was a smell of trouble in the air as pungent as the perfume off those rotting grain dumps ahead. No little bird had to tell me Bible Bill was in for something. He wasn't what you'd call my best friend, hardly, but it seemed like a mean trick to desert him in a fix, although I planned

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to do exactly that if that tough Ohio crew overhauled us.

I calculated they'd have made repairs on the double quick and were probably an hour behind. If we shoveled like Sam Hill we might clear out before they showed up. I was game to stick with Bill so long as I didn't get my nose bashed in; but whatever mess he was in, it wasn't my fight. I guess it was curiosity that kept me from desertin' him, too. Curiosity about him and Mother Damnation.

I could make out her red hair swimmin' in the water dead ahead; gave me kind of a tingle. There was goin' to be hell to pay at midnight in this port when Eagercheek and his boys arrived to knock off that dancehall queen. I didn't doubt she'd murdered Eagercheek's driver boy. They'd kill her for sure. She'd worked her game once too often—invitin' the boaters into her joint for free beer, sousing them to the gills and sneaking out a back door to rob their boats while her gamblers robbed their pockets. What cooled my scalp was that Bible Bill was hooked into some sort of deal with the woman. And his girl livin' not a stone's throw from her gin dive!

Well, I could bet he was in a sweat with that lady swimming under our bow. I heard him signal Willie to let the towline slack; then he ducked around a deckhouse where I couldn't see him, and as I steered the boats inshore, I couldn't see that diving Venus, either. It was already pretty dark from the fog, and I calculated we'd have to work like fools to get through that shovelin' job. I reckon I was too busy steering and calculating to notice anything queer up on the bow. I didn't see that woman come aboard.

All I know is that when I didn't see Bill up on the bow to signal what dock we'd come alongside, I set the tiller and ran forward for instructions. He wasn't on deck, but something else was. A string of wet footprints! There we were drifting, and there was those wet footprints crossing the foredeck and going into the captain's cabin-hatch. Bewilderin' wasn't the word for it. Fast as I could go, I hiked back aft and took the tiller. It was no time to interrupt Bible Bill if he was in conference.

I held the boats off from the bank, waiting. Then I saw something else. On the bank opposite from the Swillberg docks a girl was running through the weeds. She wore a sunbonnet hiding her face and she carried a fishpole. She was some distance off, and in the mist it took me a minute to see it was Lorna. I thought she was waving at me, then I saw she was hailin' at a launch puttering around the docks, beckoning at the motorboat to come over and get her. In a flutter of flags and bunting, the little naphtha boat crossed the canal. Professor Murgatroyd was always that obliging.

I had a green feeling in my stomach, though, when I seen the tattoo artist heading his boat toward us with Lorna in the sternsheets. *Sput, sput, sput!* every chug they came nearer made a creep go through my hair. What was happening down in Bill's cabin? What in the name of thunderation had induced him to let that female murderer come aboard? I hated to think what'd happen if the ditch ever learned he'd sneaked Mother Damnation onto his boat. Likely it would break Lorna's heart if she found out Bill was in cahoots with that vixen, and I'd like to've gone forward and wrung his neck. Only thing I could do was signal Murgatroyd to come alongside where I was steering on the *Leviticus*.

"WHERE'S Bill?" the girl demanded as she swung aboard. "I've got to see him, Low-Bridge. If he's docking here why isn't he on deck?"

"He's below in a grain hold. We sprung a leak," I lied.

She waited for the Professor to sputter away; then she clutched my arm. I caught a gleam of tears under the brim of her sunbonnet. She asked in a low, quivery tone, "Low-Bridge, what's happened to him? What's the matter with Bill?"

"Didn't know anything was," I answered, uncomfortable. I edged her around so her back was toward the lead boat,

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hoping to Hades that woman wouldn't bust out of the hatch.

"You've got to tell me," the girl said desperately. "All summer he—he hasn't been himself. Last year he—he promised to marry me this spring. But he hasn't said a word about it since. Avoids me."

"We been rush haulin' all summer," I patted her arm.

"It's not that, either," the girl declared, half sobbing. "He's so different. Not like himself. Something's happened to him. He did stop for supper the last trip. But he couldn't wait to get away. Only stayed with uncle and me for an hour. Oh, Low-Bridge! Something dreadful happened." Her lips drew a shaky breath, and she sobbed, "He went up the towpath toward Mother Damnation's tavern. Later I saw him walkin' back. Drunk!"

I said, "You maybe was mistaken, Lorna. Anyhow, he's busy now. I'll pull up against the dock in a minute and you can see him after—"

"I'm going to go to his cabin right now and wait for him."

"He ain't there. He's in one of the grain holds. Look, you hold the tiller like she is. I'll go for-ard and find him in a jiffy."

Sentimental? Who was? Maybe I'd always liked that girl, myself, see, and I was sore underneath that Bill had gypped her faith in him. Mother Damnation wasn't the only thing. There was that time Shanghai saw him hangin' around a burlesque in Albany. All the sudden I was mad about it. What'd the hypocrite mean with his preachin' and prayin', mixed up secretly with that pirate dame and hidin' something behind a pious face, necktie and Sunday-go-to-meetin' collar?

I dodged around to the starboard side where the girl couldn't see me, ducked down below the deckhouse roof and scuttled forward to the *Genesis*. The cabin hatch on that side was closed. I meant to slide the shutter and stick my face down into the companion, but the voices below stopped the impulse.

"You'll do it!" Mother Damnation was commanding hoarsely. "You'll loan me the money if you have to sell one of these boats! Huh! Tryin' to scare me off with this crazy story that Eagercheek and those bums are comin' up from Buffalo to keel-haul me!"

"I tell you, it's true!" Bill's voice broke to a squeak. "I'm not lyin'! You've got to run for it!"

"Even if it was true, I wouldn't clear out. There's dynamite in a shed behind my place, big boy. I can handle a rifle, too. I'd blow the daylights out of any fools aimin' to float me down the ditch. Blast the whole riffraff in their scows. Only I don't believe it, dearie. It's a swell trick you've thought up to get rid of me, but I ain't goin'."

"I won't help you then, do you hear? Not a cent!"

"Oh, no? Well, speakin' of murder, suppose I tell your little Erie sweetheart what I *do* know about murder?"

HOLY CALLIOPE! it took me like a sock between the ears. Bill was snitching. Warning the woman to clear out before Eagercheek caught up with her. She didn't believe him. She was touching him for money, holding somethin' over his head—that word murder, again.

And then I got another wallop between the ears. Aft, in the fogginess, a cry. A cry that rippled up thin and urgent against the silence, followed by a volley of distant shouts, snapper of whips, clatter of galloping hoofs.

Taking the canal bend into Swillberg came the *Kathleen O'Noulaheen* of Ohio and all her crew. How she took that bend! Water plunged like surf around her big blunt-nosed bow, and her wash broke over the towpath in waves. She was doing six miles an hour, or I'm a liar.

Her towrope stretched ahead of her as tight as the Atlantic cable, a knot in the middle of it as big as your head. The team galloping her along made my eyes pop like champagne corks. Steers! That Irishman had hitched up six of his steers, and they pounded in tandem harness like a stampede out of the Panhandle.

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I never saw anything like that on the Erie Canal, and I reckon nobody else had either.

Those cattlemen yelled when they saw us ahead of them. Every tramp on that scow rushed across her decks and tumbled up out of her hatches, armed to the teeth. That red-faced skipper bawled like a bull when he made out who we were. He squalled for his tillerman to swing in, and that barge came full speed ahead to overhaul us like tons of fury. I don't wonder Lorna had screamed when she saw what was looming up astern. Shin-banging aft across the *Genesis, Exodus* and *Leviticus,* I got to her side just as that steer-team went by on the towpath. Heaving all my might, I shoved the rudder to push us offshore, but three canal boats loaded with grain don't turn around on a dime; we'd lost way to come into the Swillberg docks, and that avalanche behind us couldn't miss.

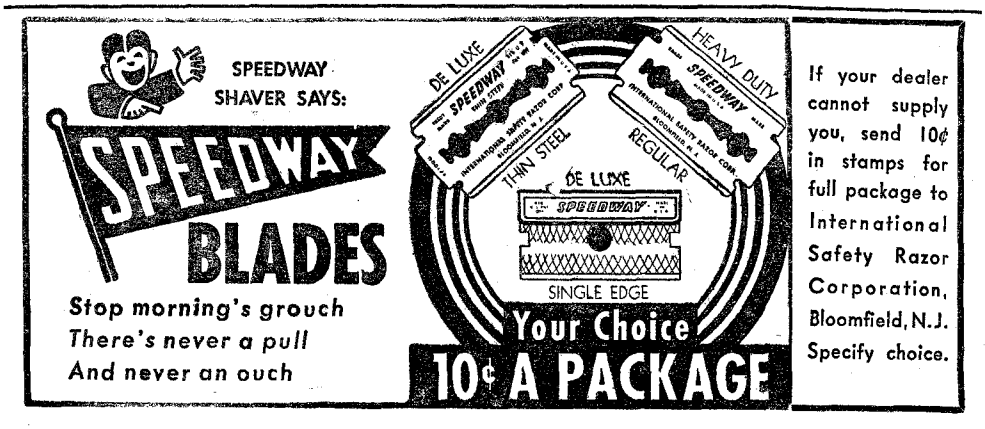
It struck us square astern with a crash you could hear a mile, smashing my tiller to matchwood. A wave of water plunged across the afterdeck; wood crunched and splintered; the jolt knocked me ahead over heels with Bill's girl in my arms; the *Kathleen O'Noulaheen* seemed to keep right on coming. And then Bible Bill had three women on his hands.

I wish I could give you a picture of the fight. Wow! what a scrap that was. As that barge slammed into us those cattle boaters came swarming over their bow like buccaneers on a holiday. I had a glimpse of Mr. Gillahan at the head of the boarding party; there was just enough of twilight left to see the blood in his eye. His teeth pugged out like a bulldog's from his underslung lower jaw. His veined nose was fiery. He was too tough for me. He lit on the deck in front of me, a big grappling iron in his fists, and he let out a war whoop to announce his arrival. I didn't stick around to exchange greetings.

Quick as I could, I'd shoved Lorna into my cabin hatch, hollerin' for her to stay quiet below. I was slapping down the hatch cover when the Irishman jumped aboard us. I only had time to howl for help and run. Shanghai came out of his cookhouse aboard the *Exodus,* gesturing a flatiron and exploding a burst of Chinese that crackled like firecrackers. In my haste to keep ahead of that cattle-boat bunch, I knocked the Chink tail over teacup. Then something knocked me tail over teacup. Something that came roaring out of the darkness forward, whooped as it jumped along the catwalk at me, hurled me to one side and went on going like a railroad engine.

I got the same whistling sensation of speed, a glimpse of galloping pistons, streaking iron. I said that guy had a boiler inside of him. All day the pressure had been mounting to volcano heat. Now the man's safety valves had blown. As Bible Bill went by me with that crowbar in his fists his eyes were yellow flames; I could almost feel the steam blast.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



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Then suddenly Gin Mike came out of nowhere, firing into the melee

One Step from Hell

By E. HOFFMAN PRICE

Author of "Rainbow's End"

In the Philippines an order is an order—even when it doesn't make sense. So O'Hara has to risk a neck to save a man from death in order that he can be killed according to the rules

I

IT WAS perhaps three in the morning when Lieutenant O'Hara of the 47th Philippine Scouts left Sugut to make the dangerous six-mile hike back to barracks. He was decently drunk; he walked straight. He always did, and his starched chino khaki uniform had not a wrinkle. Being scarcely two inches taller than the average native, O'Hara carried himself well, as most short men do.

As he climbed the narrow trail which followed the curve of Illana Bay, O'Hara began to doubt the wisdom of having gone to Sugut to see Molly White, the copra trader's daughter. He could have waited until daylight to tell her that the commanding officer had agreed to recommend him for a commission in the regular army. Being away from quarters after sunset was direct disobedience of Major Hobart's recent order.

O'Hara, however, ignored trouble until it faced him. He blew a kiss in the direction of Parang, and began singing.

Complete Novelet

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Johnny came home, the night before, as drunk as drunk could be,
He saw a hat upon the rack where no hat ought to be!
My own wife, my dear wife, my darling wife, says he,
Whose hat is on the rack where my hat ought to be?

That Molly had promptly hustled him out of the house and made him promise to go right back to barracks, instead of risking his life and chances of promotion, was flattering enough; so heart-warming that O'Hara had stopped to hoist a few drinks at Chinese Olson's *Orient Pearl.* Hence the song, which promised to carry all the way to Zamboanga.

Moro outlaws from the hills had ambushed a company of Philippine Scouts in broad daylight, along that very trail. But O'Hara discounted such hazards.

Sometimes he stumbled, as anyone would. The narrow path twisted along rocky ledges. *Bajuco* creepers crossed the way and tore his puttees. Bamboo whispered in the breeze that came from Illana Bay, and far below him, he could see the raking masts of *prahus* which waited for dawn and the fishermen. Then the road swung inland, toward the barracks which were behind Parang.

O'Hara was breathless, and he had no more voice for song. But he grinned at the moon. There were plenty of tricks for getting past the sentries and into barracks. What Major Hobart did not know would not enter into his recommendations on O'Hara's promotion.

Then the trail forked. One branch was the remaining mile to Parang. The other led into the mountains, where untamed tribesmen paid no attention to the treaty of peace between the United States and the Sultan of Sulu. It was just within sight of this spot that O'Hara saw a clump of *cogon* grass sway *against* the wind.

HE HAD that much warning, but he was unarmed. The weapons of every man not on duty were locked in racks, so that gun-hungry Moros would not be tempted into a raid in which a dozen lives would gladly be exchanged for one Springfield or Colt .45.

When O'Hara saw the two Moros step into view, he admitted he would much sooner be in barracks or back in Sugut. But he could not outrun a pair of mountaineers, and he did not believe in running.

There was not enough light to bring out the color of their shirtlike sarongs, nor the turbans which left the top of the head exposed. However, the dull gleam of oiled skin from the waist up was plain, and so was the sheen of silver and brass on the hilts of their *krisses.*

One had half drawn his wavy blade. The odds were nice. Though they would just as readily have rushed a whole platoon. Moros are that way.

O'Hara came steadily toward them, neither lengthening nor shortening his stride. By every precedent, he should have turned and run. Or in desperation, picked up a rock or stick and charged. This could have made sense to them. But his deliberate approach was against all reason. They exchanged glances, and the half-drawn *kris* did not leave its scabbard.

At arm's length, O'Hara halted. With amiable dignity he demanded in English which they could not understand, "Have a smoke, gents?" He took a cigar from his breast pocket, the only one he had left. "Want to match for it?"

He could have addressed them in their own language, but that would have spoiled it all. They stood there, gaping, too amazed to strike. O'Hara held the cigar as if exhibiting it for a sultan's approval. Suddenly, he brightened, made a gesture.

His next move was so unexpected that he lived to make it. He brushed the Moro's hand from the *kris* hilt, drew it from the scabbard, and sliced the cigar precisely in half. They did not know what to say at that breach of eitquette. They gaped. He thrust a piece into the mouth of each wayfarer, deftly flicked the blade back into the scabbard, and stalked grandly away, singing.

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He left a pair of single-tracked Moro minds groping for precedents. An infidel, drunk or sober, was fair prey; but molesting a madman brought too much hard luck to be worth the risk. And before they could classify O'Hara, he was facing another problem—this business of getting into barracks unobserved.

No sentry challenged the lieutenant, nor did the O.D. note his return. Officially, no one knew that he had disobeyed an order designed to prevent the bushwhacking of soldiers. Or at least, so O'Hara thought, until he emerged from the lukewarm shower. Cold water is unheard of, except in the mountain streams.

An orderly came in to present Major Hobart's compliments. It was far too early for anything but urgent business. O'Hara sighed and raised a peremptory hand. "Sure, and you can cut out the compliments, Santiago," he said to the Philippine soldier. "Tell the commanding officer I'm not even eating my breakfast, it's that eager I am to see him."

Santiago saluted. But he checked his smart about face, fidgeted, and looked unmilitary. O'Hara laid down his shaving brush, thrust an "Isabella" between lathered lips, and took an acrid puff. "If you ever grow a beard yourself, I'll teach ye how to shave," he sourly observed. "And what is it now?"

"Sir." Santiago straightened and came a pace nearer. His black eyes were wide. "*Mi Teniente,* it is not the absence from post without the leave which *el commandante* wishes to discuss. It is not reported that you are absence last night. It is something else. Very serious. *El commandante* is walking up and down last night by the quarters swearing very beautiful."

For Major Hobart to use profanity was entirely without precedent. "Oh. All right." O'Hara felt sick. "That's all, Santiago."

He cut himself twice. That can be done with a safety razor. Lucky that Santiago had warned him. Otherwise, he might have taken the aggressive and needlessly betrayed himself. O'Hara was still frowning when he hooked up his saber and went to report to the old man.

MAJOR HOBART was neither pacing nor cursing when O'Hara stepped into the office, but he looked as if he should have been. His blue eyes were wrathful, and his face was as squarely set as his precisely parted hair. He ceased drumming on the desktop and looked up at O'Hara.

Salutes were exchanged with uncommon precision. Major Hobart, an officer of the regular army, thought that scout officers were the War Department's biggest error in years. To commission a sergeant usually meant spoiling a good non-com to make a lieutenant utterly lacking in efficiency, soldierly character, or background.

The most flagrant of these errors were weeded out every four years, when they went up for recommissioning. Some few, like O'Hara, were recommended for the regular army. What Major Hobart could barely forgive was offering O'Hara the Congressional Medal of Honor for valor in the Datu Ali campaign. That wild Irishman had declined, taking the Certificate of Merit instead.

The guard is turned out for a Medal of Honor man, whereas the other award carries extra pay. O'Hara, a practical person, preferred *pesos* to ostentation.

"You've heard of Gin Mike?" The major leaned forward, and as an afterthought, he added, "Sit down, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir."

Everyone knew Gin Mike, a discharged soldier who had gone native. He was a troublemaker. Between *nipa* gin and women, neither of which he treated with particular discretion, he had become an outcast even among renegades. And Buck Worley, a coconut-planter, had hunted Gin Mike until he, Worley, had become too saturated in drink to kill anyone. The feud centered about the planter's former wife.

The major gave O'Hara time enough to think about the enmity which had been drowned in gin, and the way the renegade

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had beaten several native policemen with their own batons. Then he said, "Gin Mike tried to kidnap Datu Garci's intended fourth wife, and he was captured."

O'Hara brightened. He said, "It's mighty nice, hearing that, sir. Did they *kris* him, or stake him out on an anthill?"

Major Hobart's teeth sank deep into the stump of his black cigar. With schoolteacher patience, he said, "Lieutenant, you do not seem to understand. Datu Garci has not butchered Gin Mike. Not yet, that is. We've got to save him."

"Him?" This was too much. Troops *had* gone out to extricate renegades from fatal tangles just to maintain white prestige, but Gin Mike was not worth it. "Begging your pardon, sir, I think Datu Garci ought to be decorated. Give him a case of salmon, a box of cigars, and maybe a bolt of calico."

"Lieutenant, what you think is quite irrelevant. Privately I agree with you. I—damn it, I wish Buck Worley had killed him!" The major's voice shook, and he rose from his chair. Then he changed his mind about pacing. "We've got to get that scoundrel. To save face, you know. He's not dead. Datu Garci is saving him for some games at the wedding fiesta."

"If I take my company up to Garci's barrio, we'll have a nice little war. Not that I mind that, sir." He smoothed out the imaginary wrinkle in his blouse. "But I hate to get maybe a dozen of my men killed for that skunk."

"You still do not understand," the major went on. "The War Department had ordered me to keep peace at all costs. So I can't send a company. I'm sending you, single-handed."

"Me? Me, risk my neck for that *bugao?"*

Major Hobart smiled bleakly. "Last night you walked to Sugut, over a dangerous road, in direct disobedience of orders. If you had been murdered, we would have had to send out a punitive expedition. To save our faces. To prove that no Moro can *kris* a white man and get away with it.

"Lieutenant, it is prestige, and nothing else, that makes it possible for a handful of white officers to keep a semblance of order in the Islands. Once we lose face, we're finished out here. You're *not* going out to save Gin Mike. You're going out to maintain a tradition. When you came back alive from Sugut last night, you got yourself elected."

"So that's it?" O'Hara grinned. "You're not preferring charges, sir?"

The major shrugged.

"I don't know officially that you left barracks."

"Suppose,"—Irish humor was bubbling up—"suppose Gin Mike tries to escape from me?"

"That's the worst of it. He won't be your prisoner. He hasn't done a thing that makes him liable to military law. You can't come back telling me Gin Mike was shot while escaping."

O'Hara saluted and turned toward the door. He was almost at the threshold when the major sharply said, "Just a minute, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir?"

"Saving Gin Mike," he slowly said, "is giving him another chance to precipitate trouble that may cost a dozen, perhaps a hundred lives. It may cause the very hostilities that department orders command me to prevent. He has terrorized peaceful natives, and we know that he robbed and murdered a Chinese storekeeper, though there is no legal proof."

"I know all that, sir," said O'Hara, plainly puzzled at the needless details.

"Of course you do!" Major Hobart snapped. "But there is one thing you do not seem to know."

"What is that, sir?"

"A good officer," the major ponderously explained, "is resourceful enough to execute a silly order, and in a way that makes sense. That is all I can tell you. Except that you will be carried as A.W.O.L. until you return. If you return, that is."

He glared for fully five seconds. Then he thrust out his hand.

"That's all, O'Hara. I'm depending on you to keep peace in Mindanao!"

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II

NATIVE gossip and the grapevine telegraph had done a good job. O'Hara knew how much time would pass before Gin Mike faced Datu Garci's wrath. They would give the renegade a *kris* and let him face some expert Moro fighting men. They would tie him to a *carabao's* horns, to liven up a duel between two of the ponderous beasts. Details varied, but Gin Mike's death would be the climax of the wedding feast, and the end of white prestige.

When O'Hara reached Sugut, presumably for another visit with the only white girl in the copra shipping village, he learned how right Major Hobart was.

Instead of giving him a surly eye, the city natives laughed and made remarks about O'Hara's ancestry; not from any personal grudge, but simply because he was a white man and an infidel. But O'Hara pretended he did not understand that they called him the descendant of many small and filthy pigs, and added to this epithet a string of exquisite and elaborate amplifications. Eater of rats. Friend of the little bugs. Cur with a million fleas.

Some even spat at his shadow. He heard, but ignored the plop of red betel juice. In another day or two, the insult would be directed at any white man. O'Hara, however, went jauntily on. He reached Molly White's tin-roofed bungalow an hour after sunset.

When he left, he had a parcel under his arm. In addition to sandwiches, it contained a kitchen bolo, whose heavy blade was about a foot long. This last item, like the gaudy sarong and scarf and sash, had been furnished by Molly's maid, a Christianized native. O'Hara hoped that her discretion would outweigh her love of chatter. No matter how he got native clothing to replace his uniform, he risked unintentional or malicious betrayal.

He laughed off Molly's queries. Then both she and her weatherbeaten father sensed that it would be better not to know what was behind O'Hara's strange request.

O'Hara headed back again toward the barrio proper. It was a disorderly scattering of *nipa*-thatched shacks that filled the space between the beach and the steep hills. Near the copra warehouses that flanked the water front was the *Orient Pearl,* one of the few places where white men gathered in Sugut.

The *tienda* was built of corrugated iron, and lighted by a few kerosene lamps with smudged reflectors. Olson, proprietor and bartender, had enough Chinese blood to give a grotesque twist to his Scandinavian face. He was big, burly, and pot-bellied, and his hairy paws aimlessly pushed a dirty rag up and down he zinc-topped bar.

The customers were equally unsavory. They looked the way the *Orient Pearl* smelled — sour, greasy, and unwashed. Smugglers, sunshiners, and part-time pirates they were, in the main; though Barlow was an honest planter who was tired of his native wife, and not selling enough coconuts to get away from Mindanao.

Then there was Buck Worley, who still grieved over the loss of his *mestiza* wife. That she had ended in a dive in Zamboanga somehow failed to console him. He was sentimental about such things, and still justly blamed Gin Mike for kidnaping her and all too quickly making her like it.

He sat there, drooling and not bothering to wipe his chin. He was no taller than O'Hara. Deep lines seamed his face, which somehow had not become puffy, except under the eyes. They were bloodshot. He was sniffling and saying to the glass which Olson would no longer refill: "She didn't like it. He knocked her on the head and took her there."

That was an old story, and no one paid any attention to it. There might have been some truth in it. Native women, accustomed to a code that allows no alibis, are afraid to brazen it out. They never learn a thing about white man's ways, and cannot believe that they will not be carved with a bolo, just on general principles, no matter whose fault it was.

"Hi, Buck," said O'Hara, carelessly lay-

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ing his parcel in the shadow of the table. He slid into an empty chair, beckoned to Olson. "Whisky."

OLSON lumbered across the creaking floor. He owed the world a grudge for the Chinese flavor of his Scandinavian face and body. But Mindanao has little regard for genealogy. Life is too short for such considerations. At O'Hara's gesture, he left the bottle.

Worley told O'Hara all about the tragedy. It became easier as the bottle wore down. The lieutenant slouched in his chair, listening. His eyes had a wild gleam, at times his mouth twisted a little, but in the main, he put on a sympathetic front. He was sorry for Worley, a discharged soldier who had made the mistake of staying in the Islands.

"But I ain't got the guts to kill the louse," Worley blubbered. Everyone knew that refrain. "It ain't the girl that's making a pig of me. It's because I didn't have the guts to beat him up. Or anything."

Gin Mike was a big man, the kind O'Hara had enjoyed whittling down with bare fists back in the old days when he did not have an officer's dignity to uphold. Sometimes, picking one who was not only big but good, he learned the advantages of weight, but this never ruffled him. Yet he knew how some people felt about such things. Buck Worley was one of them.

The derelict's voice cracked a little. He was saying, "Garci's killing that big tramp. If I knew him, I'd go to the show. If it was Datu Bugasan, he'd invite me. His men never bothered my plantation."

"Bugasan's a nice fellow," O'Hara agreed. His eyes were bright now and he carefully emptied the bottle. Worley had taken enough. "Now, there's something to say that I'd rather not tell you."

"What? About her?" The derelict was pathetically eager to take more punishment. He could enjoy his drinks better.

He clawed O'Hara's sleeve, and forgot his empty glass.

"Nuh-uh. About Gin Mike. Don't for Pete's sweet sake tell anyone."

He stopped short. Worley promised secrecy. O'Hara went on, "The C.O.'s making me go out to get Gin Mike before the fiesta. It makes me feel rotten, when the heel ought to get sliced crosswise."

Worley couldn't believe that anyone would rescue the renegade, but O'Hara convinced him. "So I'll buy you a bottle to take home, Buck. You're a good guy, and I feel stinking, doing you that kind of dirt."

O'Hara made a warning gesture, then beckoned to Olson. "Same stuff, but just a pint this time."

When the Swede brought the liquor, O'Hara handed it to Worley and said, "Maybe this'll square it, soldier."

Worley made as if to uncork the pint, then changed his mind. He was going to get a refund, and then buy gin; several gallons of it, in *grandes* and a few clackers in change. He cuddled the whisky against his ragged shirt and incredulously eyed his benefactor.

"Jeeps, Lieutenant, you can't get him out of Garci's barrio. You'll be killed sure."

"That's why I wanted to talk to you," O'Hara answered, now that he had worked up to his point. "I can get in. That's easy. But it's getting back, savvy? Lookee here." He drew a few lines with his forefinger, on the wet table top. "The barrio's behind Anting-Anting Hill. That's tough country, and I'll have to go through to Cotabato. Unless I can hide out in a friendly barrio that isn't too far from the direct trail."

"There's Di-Ig," said Worley, after a moment of intense concentration.

O'Hara feigned sudden recollection. "Say, you got something there, soldier! One of Datu Bugasan's barrios."

"Sure. He's a nice guy." Worley was warming up to kindness. For a white man to drink with him restored a shred of self-respect. "And I bet I can help you."

This was more than O'Hara had expected. "How?"

"You get to Di-Ig. I'll wait there. I can help you hide out, or get on through.

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That's near where my plantation used to be, and I know that country blindfolded. Better than any soldier or any of Datu Garci's men."

"You mean," O'Hara said, speaking very slowly, "you'll help me get Gin Mike back to town? If I come back, he'll be with me."

"I don't care. I never had guts enough to knock his head off, and a man oughtn't to live this way. And you're a good guy, Lieutenant."

O'Hara considered the sunshiner's offer. He dug some money out of his pockets, looked at Buck's bare feet, and said, "Buy yourself some shoes. It's not right for a white man to run around that way."

He watched Worley weave toward the door. "Maybe," he dubiously told himself, as he left the *tienda*, "Worley can help."

III

SUGUT was sound asleep when O'Hara left the barrio, apparently to return to barracks. But when he reached the fork of the trail, where he had bluffed the two prowling Moros, he halted and unwrapped his parcel. Then he peeled out of his uniform and carefully inspected the .45 automatic which had made his pocket sag all evening.

He hid his clothing under a rock and put on the skirtlike sarong that both sexes wear. "Being barefooted is bad," he muttered, "and running around without pants is worse."

Major Hobart had insisted on giving him a small bottle of pyro developer from the photographic dark room. O'Hara applied the stuff to his skin with a tuft of cotton. In a few hours it would darken to deep walnut. This was not to enable him to pass as a native in face-to-face encounters; it was merely to keep his white skin from being unduly visible in the dark.

Finally he wrapped the maid's scarf about his head, turbanwise, thrust the kitchen bolo into his sash, along with his pistol, two spare clips, and his sandwiches. For added security, he wore a lanyard about his neck; this was hooked to the eye in the butt of his automatic.

O'Hara's destination was just about half way between Parang and Cotobato. Datu Garci's village, in the shadow of Anting-Anting Hill, was the high spot of the trail which went inland, and then looped back toward the coast. Five hours march by night, or four by day, would get him to Gin Mike's prison.

O'Hara walked with the quick, short steps of a Moro. He had the silhouette of a native. His peering, head cocking, pausing to listen along the way were not any act. He had often suspected that the hill tribes could smell a white man. Unhappily, he had not had time to wallow for a day or so in a barrio near the post until he acquired the Moro scent.

Once a pair of unblinking eyes glowed out of the gloom. He halted, drew his bolo. A shot would alarm some wandering Moro, or set in action the jungle telegraph. Though it might already have brought whispers of him into the mountains.

The eyes swayed slowly, like a lantern swinging in a breeze. O'Hara picked up a piece of dead wood and hurled it. There was a hiss, a rustling of foliage, and the eyes disappeared. Nothing but a small python, hanging down to snatch some unwary deer on its way to drink.

This told him that dawn was not far away. So did the damp chill of the air, and its very taste. He had not smoked since leaving Parang, and so he could scent the tang of a jungle that had recuperated from the blast furnace of the day just past.

A jungle cock crowed. Somewhere, a *gecko* lizard mocked him. The hoarse and derisive cry was a single word; perfect barrackroom English. It made O'Hara think of Gin Mike.

He was not far from Anting-Anting Hill. Through gaps in the overhead foliage, he could at times pick out its conical blackness against a sky that was no longer quite dark. Then he caught the gray-green that comes before the first pink of dawn. The sun would soon pop up over the peaks of the Manobos Range.

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Once Mindanao awakened the trail would no longer be dangerous; it would be fatal. He walked at a crouch now, alert as a runner ready to take off at the starter's gun. Alert, but not tense.

Something warned O'Hara, though he did not quite know what it was. He halted. He still could not hear, but he knew that he soon would catch a sound. Very slowly, deliberately as though he had all week to make the move, he shrank back into the tall *cogon* grass.

Its stems were nearly as thick as his little finger. Its blades cut his bare legs and shoulders. But it did not rustle. He was grinning, and the words of the bugle call that turns the garrison prisoners out of the guard house for fatigue flashed through his mind:

I got six months to get this done.
I got six months to do this one,
And I don't give a damn if it never gets done!

THEN he heard the *slap-slap* of bare feet on the trail. This was the sound he had expected: Moros on the prowl. He nodded contentedly, and warmed to the first thrill he'd known since they put braid on his sleeve. Major Hobart would have let them overtake him for the major was a gentleman, and he had had no training in sneaking into barrios for a bottle of gin.

Three Moros paused just beyond him. They had come up-grade. They were talking in a guttural whisper. He caught enough to know that they had followed him, though he did not know from what point. No one need have heard him talking to Buck Worley in the *Orient Pearl*. Moro Land is too primitive to require anything as direct as eavesdropping. Some native had added two and two, the way a tiger does.

Another thing: They thought they had lost him, or they would not be whispering and muttering. This gave O'Hara more confidence then he had felt when he assured Major Hobart that he could stand on his head and find Gin Mike.

He leaned forward to hear better. A twig snapped. That one twig in all Mindanao had to crackle, under the bare foot of a man who had outwitted *cogon* grass.

The Moro whispers ended in silence. They read each other's thought. And three wavy edged *krisses* whipped out, a fire fly flicker in the thinning gloom.

O'Hara drew his .45. He could not finish three Moros, not even with that heavy automatic. One or two would escape in the darkness, and Datu Garci would know that someone was on the prowl. The village would move leaving empty huts and a white man's remains.

The trio passed him. But that was no salvation. Daylight would expose him before the hunters were far enough ahead to let him resume his march.

O'Hara held his breath. He took one cat-pace toward the trail, poised, then stretched his legs in a long bound. His gun chopped down. The Moro nearest him dropped, and O'Hara closed in. He was right behind the middle man of the file before either of the two survivors could react.

Pop! The fellow was wheeling, his blade darting out; but O'Hara's blow did not glance from the turbanned head. The third, however, had whirled. He set himself and mad a hissing slash with his *kris*.

O'Hara leaped back, gun at his hip. There were no cries, no yells. Neither had breath to waste. The wiry Irishman shifted his weapons, taking his bolo in his right hand.

The Moro grunted, and darted in. O'Hara twisted. The rippled blade grazed his arm. Luckily he had not tried to parry. The Moro recoiled, attempting to trick him into getting his bolo out of line.

O'Hara sidestepped, and his pistol came up. The hanmmer-click, and the dull glint of metal in the first light of dawn settled the issue. The native had seen two of his comrades drop. Fighting by night always was bad luck. Too many evil spirits played tricks. So he wheeled and raced back toward Parang.

O'Hara did not pursue. It would be too

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easy to run into an ambush. The three who had trailed him were not Datu Garci's men; that they had followed from Parang clearly indicated that. Curiosity and hope of loot had drawn them on.

He headed straight for the barrio, and waded into a ford where the trail cut the Semoy River. The village was scarcely half a mile upstream. On his right was the cone-shaped hill, an extinct volcanic crater whose slopes were covered with dense jungle. He kept to the water to hide his trail.

As he rounded a bend, O'Hara stepped back into cover just in time to avoid being spotted by a group of naked Moros. They were splashing in a pool, taking their morning bath. Dawn had arrived, and the village was awake. O'Hara was bottled up. The prowler who had escaped would as a matter of honor wait for him. Whatever went up had to come down.

O'HARA crept up the steep slope of Anting-Anting Hill. The lavender-gray pumice slid freely. He had to plan each move ahead, lest he start a small avalanche. Sharp tongues of lava slashed him as he reached the lip of the crater. The last hundred yards were the worst. There was no vegetation, and any idle glance from the village would spot his gaundy sarong and turban.

That would be a dead giveaway. The very name of the hill indicated that no Moro would scale it, except under urgent necessity. It meant: "Good luck charm or fetish"; it was not to be approached idly.

That, however, was an advantage, when he slid over the lip without having noted any alarm below. Years of tradition would make a blind spot in native wit. They would hardly seek him there, even if they did suspect the presence of an intruder. Their first move would be to beat the jungle.

Binoculars would have helped O'Hara, but he had neither foreseen the need nor wished to encumber himself. Still, his eyes were keen. He had scored a "possible" on the 800-yard targets for the past three seasons.

The warrior who squatted in front of a hut in the middle of the barrio arose and yawned. He stretched himself like a big brown cat, until his upraised hands reached well above the stilt supported floor of the shack. It was *nipa*-thatched, walls and roof alike. Some of the more pretentious houses had sides of woven rattan.

O'Hara was thinking, "Those shacks burn easy." But he did not know just what to do with that idea.

A blue haze hid all but the roofs of the huts. It came from the smudge fires built in the six foot space between floor and ground, and rose through the half inch gaps which separated the split bamboo flooring. This somewhat discouraged mosquitos.

"Gin Mike must be in that shack," O'Hara reasoned. "It's a guess, anyway."

But he would have all day in which to confirm his opinion. For once, he was not inclined to recklessness. Whatever he did would have to be right the first time. And this necessity kept him from thinking too much of the three who had trailed him from Parang.

IV

BROWN women with oiled black hair extinguished the smoke screen. Some were bare from the waist up. Others wore red or yellow or blue jackets, usually contrasting with an equally gaudy sarong. From the height of the crater, O'Hara could follow them as they filed down a narrow path, carrying water jars on their heads.

Their shrill chatter was plain. And those who returned were gleaming from their morning plunge. Their sarongs clung to wet skin.

Presently the ladies of Moro-land were back at their shacks starting fires on the earthen hearths outside their houses. These primitive stoves were of bamboo lashed together with rattan to form a table, which supported the rammed earth and rock. The breeze carried the savory odor of venison and small red peppers from the steaming pots.

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O'Hara was hungry. His sandwiches, wedged into his sash, were soggy, but they were food.

A tall man descended from the largest house in the group. After him came a servant who held a big black parasol over the master's head. The staff was gilded, and the deep fringe was red. This token of royalty identified Datu Garci as certainly as his unusual height.

Another servant followed with a betel nut box, which he offered when the datu had finished adjusting his sarong, and thrusting a long-bladed *sundang aranti* into his sash.

The morning dragged on.

The sun blazed down into the crater, and drove the Moros into the shade, where they squatted on their haunches, chewing betel nut and spitting. Groups gathered about bamboo cages of fighting cocks. Just beyond the scattering of huts, women cleared away some second growth brush, chopping down *cogon* grass with bolos. They were preparing the arena, a bowl-shaped depression suitable for festivity.

At intervals, families arrived from the hinterland. Some came with carefully guarded champion fighting cocks. Others led small, shaggy stallions with the temper of tigers. They traveled on foot, in the main, though a hill-*datu* arrived on horse. His saddle was shaped like a saw buck. An atrocious contrivance, but gaily decked out with silver and burnished brass and scarlet cords. Datu Garci went out to meet him. O'Hara could only guess at the identity of this important visitor.

In the deeper shade, *carabaos* grunted and muttered. The lumbering water buffalos could not endure the blistering sun. They would not fight until late in the afternoon. O'Hara's only chance was that Gin Mike's fate would be reserved to the last. Like a headliner at a benefit.

The crater's rim was beginning to cut off the impact of the descending sun when a man came loping up the trail. He shouted and waved his *kris*. Whatever the fellow said, it set the village in an uproar.

Women and children dashed into the open space, milling around with the gesticulating warriors. Datu Garci towered over them, hand raised for silence. The new comer seemed to be a stranger. O'Hara could get that from the posture of the chief and the mesenger.

Garci was a leader, no doubt about that. His voice dominated the confusion, and there was order. Small parties of armed men formed, trotted toward the trail which led to Parang. Some crashed directly into the brush beyond which was the Semoy River. They were going to follow the stream.

O'HARA was sweating. Everything indicated a general search. Whatever the news—as a guess, it must have been word of his encounter with the three who had trailed him—it had scattered armed parties in every direction. The worst of several possibilities was that someone might spot the tracks he had made in scaling Anting-Anting Hill.

By the time that the arena had been cleared and the searching parties were well on their way, the sun was behind the hill. Once more, the smoke of cooking fires curled up from the *nipa*-shacks. Darkness gradually blended the tree trunks into a stippled palisade of shadows.

Night mists rose from the rotting vegetation. Mosquitos hummed out in clouds. They swarmed over O'Hara, buzzing, biting, blackening his bare skin. The intolerable itching and swelling blended with the fever and fury of helpless wrath.

The winking smudge fires mocked him. He tried to pull the sarong over his head, to imitate the natives below. He tried curling up in a knot. But his unseasoned, sweaty skin was a gourmet's delight to the buzzing pests; there was no escape. Even the small relief of cursing or slapping was denied him.

Bit by bit, the barrio quieted down. By the glow of smudge fires, O'Hara saw an armed man squatting in front of the door of the shack he had noted that morning. He was more certain than ever

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that this was Gin Mike's prison; and in all probability the fiesta had been postponed to allow for the return of the search parties who combed the hills.

O'Hara stealthily clambered down over the lip of the crater. Motion was a relief from the cramped waiting.

Occasionally, a restless Moro padded silently to the stream. The only sound now was the pawing of the stallions. Jungle mist and smudge smoke blanketed the village. O'Hara, step by step, worked his way nearer. All that sustained him was what he had in store for Gin Mike when they got through the cordon of Moro patrols. He wondered what Major Hobart would say.

O'Hara finally reached the outlying shacks. He kept to their shadows, and headed for the rear of Gin Mike's prison.

A bamboo ladder creaked as someone's weight strained the rattan lashings. O'Hara ducked into the darkness and stench beneath the nearest house. A dog yelped, dashed away, then turned to sniff and growl.

The Moro who had stepped from the ladder eyed the dog, then squatted to peer under the house. The wind shifted, and the smoke screen that stifled O'Hara swung about, choking the suspicious native. Satisfied that the dog had seen nothing more than a prowling night demon, the fellow headed from the stream. The dog still growled a little, but went with him.

O'Hara crept past the smudge. For some moments, he was at the mercy of any restless villager who might thrust his head out of a shack. But he finally reached the rear of Gin Mike's prison. He had already decided against trying to slip up on the sentry who squatted at the front. Instead he drew his bolo and set to work at the corner.

The walls of this shack were thatched with *nipa*. He fumbled until he found the rattan strand to which the palm leaves were fastened. The bundles of *nipa* were laid on, row after row, very much in the manner of elongated shingles. O'Hara worked the blunt point of his bolo between the corner post and the loop of rattan. He twisted, pried; and with his free hand, he held the length that was weighted by thatch.

THERE was scarcely a sound when the wiry fiber yielded. But laying the dry *nipa* aside without a rustle was tricky work. Above and somewhat in front of him, he heard Gin Mike's muttering and stirring. The split-bamboo flooring creaked a little.

O'Hara outwitted another layer of thatch, and a third. He secured his bolo and pistol, slowly brought his grasp and weight against the corner post, and listened to the prisoner's breathing. Peril had numbed the wiry Irishman's nerves. There was nothing left in him but wrath for the renegade whose folly had put another white man's neck on the block. He was thinking, "If it wasn't my own head I'm gambling, I'd be laughing. It's crazy, the whole business."

If Buck Worley had been less chicken-hearted, he'd have settled Gin Mike long ago. No one would have investigated. Certainly neither the army, nor neither the constabulary.

The sentry had become accustomed to the prisoner's stirring. O'Hara timed his movements to coincide with Mike's. There was scarcely an added rustle when he pulled himself through the hole in the wall. Only a slight and wiry man could have slipped between the bared uprights that stiffened the wall.

The white blob in the gloom was Gin Mike's bulk. His shirt and trousers could just be distinguished. Reaching his side was easy, though very slow. But the worst was ahead of O'Hara. Even a whisper might be fatal.

Finally he slipped his hand over the prisoner's open mouth. The flabby face twitched. O'Hara clamped down on a four day's growth of beard and blocked all but a gurgle. He laid the cold steel of the bolo along the prisoner's arm, hoping that that would give him a silent hint.

But Gin Mike squirmed, snorted, tried

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to resist what he thought was a stealthy assassin come to take private vengeance: some relative of the girl he had almost kidnaped. The floor creaked as the captive's bound feet rose, then thumped down.

The sentry muttered, spat, and said, "Brother of several pigs, do you think you're going to break loose?"

V

THE man below could scarcely have understood what was going on. Otherwise he would have given the alarm, instead of coming nimbly up the ladder. It was not until he cleared the threshold that he sensed something was wrong. O'Hara had not moved swiftly enough to get to the wall.

The sentry whirled and drew his *kris*.

That move was wasted. O'Hara's bolo was already out. It chopped down. Once was enough. The only sound was the muted tinkle of steel, and the thump of the Moro dropping across the threshold. His bare feet kicked for a moment, then he slid back to the ground.

"Shut up," O'Hara said to the prisoner. "I just finished a guy worth six of you! Hold still while I cut you loose."

Amazement shocked Gin Mike into silence. His ankles and wrists were swollen from the rattan cords that had bound them. O'Hara crouched at the door, waiting for the sunshiner to recover the use of his numbed limbs. Seconds dragged. The breeze shifted, and the smudge smoke hid the sentry huddled at the foot of the ladder.

O'Hara picked up the *kris*, thrust it into his sash, and wiped sweat from his forehead. He whispered, "If you can move, crawl into the corner. Wait a second. I'll go first."

He picked up the *chinelas* Gin Mike had kicked off. Nobody but a sunshiner or native could keep them on. They had neither heel nor counter. The released captive, collecting his wits, wanted his footgear, but O'Hara said, "It's barefooted you're going until we get on the trail. Do you think you can go slip-slopping around in them?"

He slid through the hole in the corner, and down into the gray smoke that blanketed the ground. Gin Mike, tall and potbellied, kicked air with his bare feet for a moment. Finally he got his stomach clear of the opening. Then he followed, with O'Hara supporting part of his weight. For a moment they crouched, listening and looking. Luck still held. They crept toward the jungle.

Time was valuable. Escape depended on how long it was before the sentry was found dead at his post. But O'Hara needed information. He said to the sunshiner, who still could not quite understand his good fortune, "What was all the ruckus about, this afternoon?"

"They heard about a crazy officer. Three Moros followed him up the Parang trail. Datu Garci sent out patrols to find him before he got killed. Before the fellows from Parang connected with him. He didn't want an officer knocked off in his territory. Say—are you—?"

"Uhuh." It began to flash through O'Hara's mind. The two Moros into whose mouths he had thrust the halves of his last cigar must have felt foolish when they recollected their dumb confusion. So, with a third companion they had trailed him.

"That's me. Which trail are they covering? Both of them?"

"No. They figured you were nuts and wandering around between here and Parang. So Garci had them beat the bush a while, then head toward Parang."

The safest return would be toward Cotobato. In view of Gin Mike's knowledge of the Moro dialects, he could hardly be mistaken. A few minutes of stealthy advance brought them to the main trail, which passed along the further slope of Anting-Anting Hill. Here the sunshiner resumed his *carabao*-hide *chinelas*.

The distance was short; a five-hour march if they met no patrols. But both men knew that it might take them the rest of their lives to reach Cotabato and the river which emptied into Illana Bay.

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TIME had dragged during O'Hara's long watch in the crater; now it raced. He had not slept, except in uneasy moments. False vigor made him alert as he picked his way down the trail; then flashes of weariness made him want to crawl into the *cogon* grass and rest. Sometimes the mosquitos tortured him to fury, and he barely restrained himself from turning on Gin Mike, who was to blame for all this.

Above all things, he needed a clear head. And that was just what he did not have.

It made him touchy.

"Slow down, you chump," he whispered to Gin Mike. "You'll make too much noise."

"I wanta get out of here. Before they miss me. Gimme that *kris*. They're likely to jump us anywhere."

O'Hara handed him the dead sentry's weapon. But he said, "Even if there are patrols out around here, they're camped."

Finally the trail rose toward a crest whose volcanic soil had not disintegrated enough to support vegetation. Monkeys were stirring in the branches. Some cried sleepily, others, more alert, were already beginning to chatter. It was not long until daylight. O'Hara's deadly weariness was leaving him. He had survived the hour when sentries nod and the sick give up.

There would be false dawn, then bitter blackness, then the sun.

Ahead, O'Hara caught the faint scent of fire. The breeze was normally seaward at that hour, but gaping craters made local eddies. He tapped Gin Mike's shoulder. "Get it? One of Garci's patrols, huh?"

The sunshiner cursed. "What'll we do?" He hefted his *kris*. "Rush 'em?"

In the gloom O'Hara could just distinguish the fugitive's face. It seemed somewhat less flabby than it had in Parang and Sugut. He had probably sweated out the gin during his captivity. His voice did not tremble. The fellow was a heel and a bully, but not yellow.

"First, take a look-see. If you'd done that instead of getting fresh with Datu Garci's girl, you'd not be in this jam!"

"Who are you, anyway?"

"O'Hara. Forty-Seventh Scouts."

Gin Mike thrust out a hairy paw. "I don't know why you did it."

"Skip it." O'Hara could not take the extended hand. Gin Mike shrugged. He thought it was an officer's contempt for a sunshiner, but his guess was wrong. "I came because I was ordered to."

"Huh? Who sent you?"

"Major Hobart."

Gin Mike pondered, looked back through ten year's haze, and remembered. His voice softened when he said, "There was a Captain Hobart in the 27th Infantry. I used to soldier in that outfit. In Cuartel d'España."

"That's not why," said O'Hara. "It's because you used to be white. Now shut up—let me go ahead."

He felt better, now that he had blown off steam.

Yard after yard, now that they had passed the barren crest, O'Hara led the way among thorny creepers. The trail, little used, since Cotabato was more easily approached by the river, was worse than the one from Parang to Datu Garci's village.

O'Hara noted the strengthening smell of smudge. He heard the ripple of a small stream that went to join the river. False dawn had passed. When he rounded another kink in the trail, he saw fire glaring against the blackness. But that short distance would take long minutes. He halted, reached back to catch Gin Mike's hunched shoulder. He could not even risk a whisper to second the warning.

Though the village had been dangerous enough, security had dulled the vigilance of Datu Garci's men. On the trail, they took nothing for granted.

The path dipped down into the stream. But its ripple would not mask the splash of a dislodged rock, nor would human disturbance of the water have the sound of an animal coming early to drink. The camp not only slept *kris* in hand, but with both ears open.

At first, O'Hara thought that the thump-

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ing he had felt rather than heard was the pounding of his pulse. Then he knew his error, just as Gin Mike reached and caught his ankle. The sunshiner had heard and understood.

A WAR gong sounded, back toward Anting-Anting; a deep *bong-bong-bong*. It was four feet in diameter, pot shaped, rather than the saucer disk of the Chinese temple bell; it coughed out blasts that carried five or six miles. Its reverberation could be felt further. Someone had found the dead sentry and missed the prisoner.

The patrol was awake. A sleepy mutter exploded into the chatter of half a dozen men. *Krisses* clacked dully in their scabbards. The chief shouted, brush crackled; the Moros spread out to cover both flanks of the trail. They did not know how close the fugitives were, but they understood the signal: Bottle up every path, let no one pass.

There was order in that flurry. In a few seconds, not a voice sounded, nor twig crackled. Far off, the gong bellowed anew.

No amount of stealth could get O'Hara and Gin Mike past half a dozen cat-eyed Moros. Back in the barrio, daylight exposed the trail of the escaped prisoner. In his haste, O'Hara had left enough signs for any mountaineer to follow at a fast lope.

The sharper note of smaller gongs accented the deep voice of the one that hung in the center of the village. These were accompanying the pursuit. Dips of the trail muffled them for a moment, then they sounded nearer. O'Hara could no longer see the glow of smudges. The jungle seemed peaceful, tenanted only by chattering birds.

With enough ammunition and another pistol, there would have been a fair chance of running the gauntlet. O'Hara drew back, and crouched beside Gin Mike, just off the trail. The sunshiner's red hair was blood matted. His hairy chest was slashed, and the white shirt hung in shreds. He had put up a good fight to keep from being taken alive.

His flabby face, the pot belly that sprawled over the waist band of his canvas trousers, and the teeth blackened from chewing betel nut: these were an old story to O'Hara. He spent a glance looking for fear in the blood-shot eyes. But that was missing.

He fingered the hilt of a long *kris*. "Wish I had a drink." Gin Mike grimaced. "Water, I mean. So they sent you because I used to be white?"

Gin Mike seemed amused by the size of his companion. O'Hara for a moment was thinking beyond the ambush. "What are you going to do when you get out of this?"

"Sure of yourself, huh? How we going to do it?"

"We'll make it." But O'Hara crouched there, scowling. This whole business was crazy. Worst of all, he no longer resented the renegade, nor felt so sorry about Buck Worley. "Listen, fellow. The army is pretty tired of your tricks. If you'd been butchered, back there, every white man in Mindanao would be on the spot. If you do get out of this, Datu Garci'll try to knife you on the sly. You're not worth a punitive expedition."

"I guess I ain't."

"When you hit Cotabato, take the first *prahu* and get out. Stay out. Or I'll—" He looked up, studied Gin Mike for a moment. Abruptly he extended his hand. "Get out before some white man kills you. You got it coming."

Gin Mike nodded. "Thanks, Lieutenant. You look funny in that sarong and turban. You look like a *gugu*. Brown as one."

"I was thinking of that. Take my pistol, and give me that *kris*. I'll show you a trick."

Gin Mike could not figure it out. There was something that O'Hara himself could not understand; the reason for what he was about to do. He rose, and gave the renegade his orders. Gin Mike gaped.

"That's the way it's got to be," O'Hara growled, "and if we get through, keep running. But don't let me catch up with you in Cotabato."

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"I don't blame you, Lieutenant. Very well, sir." His big paw rose in a salute. "You won't catch up. Nobody will."

VI

O'HARA bounded from cover. He had his bolo in one hand, a *kris* in the other. As he ran down the trail, bent in a crouch, he howled and flailed his weapons. They made glittering circles in the rising sun. He looked and sounded like a Moro running amuck. He was not going to play the *juramentado* who has taken a solemn oath to slash infidels to pieces until he was cut down; his role was that of a man who has lost face, and cannot any longer endure the scorn of his fellow tribesmen.

The gongs had given news of someone leaving the village, but they had not told why. A man caught violating a tribal *tabu* would want to die fighting; that would be better than capture.

The men who guarded the trail understood this. The first sounds of O'Hara's advance had brought them from cover. His voice set them back on their heels. They saw the gleam of the steel, the bright turban, the sarong. They had no time to note any details. They would have preferred not meeting a madman, but the gongs gave them their orders.

O'Hara did not spar or fence. That would have been out of character. He leaped from a boulder, and shot right for the center of the clustered steel. His *kris* dashed aside a cut that would have shorn him in half. His bolo slashed a descending arm, so that the cut struck him flatwise. He cleared the leading two. One of them was down, one hand clutching a ripped stomach, the other hacking at O'Hara's leg.

That broke his stride. He whirled, throwing himself sidewise. A creeper tripped the nearest Moro, who swung with him. O'Hara chopped down. It was a clumsy stroke, but it paralyzed the arm that reached up to finish him.

Then Gin Mike got into action. He did not fire until a dozen yards separated him from the Moros who had swooped into a crescent to finish the madman. O'Hara, blinded by blood from his slashed scalp, could not retreat, nor could he untangle himself quickly enough to meet the rush.

The renegade caught them from the flank. The gun was empty in three seconds. The heavy slugs knocked the wiry tribesmen off their feet. Hammer blows could not have felled them more surely, and it made little difference where the bullets landed. At that range, markmanship was not necessary.

Surprise, and deadly firing, and Gin Mike's hoarse voice did the trick. He had lost his *chinelas*. Barefooted, he drove a kick to the chin of a Moro who was trying to rise.

O'Hara lurched from the entangling vines. "Shake it up!" he yelled.

A bound carried him clear of the skirmish. Gin Mike was fumbling with the automatic. O'Hara snatched it, broke the lanyard, and thrust in a fresh clip as he followed. He whirled, hosed the trail with lead. That stopped the renew pursuit. His head was spinning, and his leg dragged. He wondered if someone had sliced his stomach open. He clawed himself, and felt only blood.

He was too far gone to realize that this trick attack had moved so swiftly that not a sound cut had landed. He began laughing, cackling at the thought of having offered himself as bait, so that a sunshiner could complete the surprise; the only way two men could have smashed through that ambush.

The fight must have lasted all day. The sunlight was red, then it became black. Sometimes he knew that Gin Mike was dragging him, fairly lifting him off the ground. Again, the big hand slipped, and O'Hara was shocked into momentary clearness of wit by stumbling over sharp rocks.

The far off gongs whipped the renegade to long strides. He kicked O'Hara to his feet. O'Hara mumbled. "Run along, you lousy *bugao!* Gimme my gun. I'll wait for 'em."

"You got your gun, Lieutenant. Hurry up."

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But O'Hara tore a piece from his sarong and made a tourniquet. He was certain now that none of his vitals were dragging on the ground, though his ribs and chest and thighs were crisscrossed with slashes.

The sunshiner waited. He had been slashed as he ploughed through the tangle.

"Hurry up, I can't carry you."

O'Hara lurched after him. He was trying to think of something important, but the sun and his battered head could not agree. It had something to do with Buck Worley. . . . Whatever he had to tell Gin Mike could wait.

HE DID not know when it was that they stopped for a drink. He toppled from Gin Mike's supporting hand, and splashed into the pool. That refreshed him. He sat up, looking at a white butterfly orchid. He began laughing. Someone or other had had a native wife; had called her "Little White Orchid." A fine thing to call a squaw!

Then O'Hara brushed Gin Mike's hand aside and regained his feet. "I'm okay. Just tired."

They tramped on, always down-grade. The gongs were silent. O'Hara wondered why Datu Garci's guest, the horseman from the hills, had not ridden after him. He did not know that Cotabato was too near for continued pursuit.

When Gin Mike said something about water, O'Hara grumbled, "It's whisky I want. Lots of whisky."

"Maybe I don't," the renegade muttered.

He was done in by now. What he lacked in wounds, he made up in fatigue. His ankles and wrists were bloody from rattan thongs. Flies buzzed and bit. As they stumbled along, O'Hara got his second wind; reserves of endurance rose to the surface, and the shock of *kris* cuts wore away. "Buck up, you big stiff," he croaked. "There's water ahead. Lift your feet. I can't carry you!"

Then Gin Mike smelled Illana Bay, and saw its gleam. They were out of the mountains. The masts of fishing *prahus* reached into the blazing sun, and the ground steamed. The fugitives were in the open now, with no shelter from glare.

O'Hara found a fisherman asleep near a boat. Parang was hardly twenty miles away, by water. Once they passed the old naval station's ruins at Polloc Point, Parang would be visible. *"Siki, hombre!"* O'Hara commanded, booting the fellow to his feet.

He was a Chinaman, but he understood; not only the order, but that the two haggard men who wove on their bleeding feet meant business. It was not rust that stained their weapons.

O'Hara watched Gin Mike collapse among the nets in the prow. He picked himself a spot in the reeking boat, and said to the skipper, "Chop-chop, savvey plenty?"

His chin slumped to his chest. He got up, flung a rag over Gin Mike's bare head and face, then seated himself. There was something he wanted to tell the sunshiner, but he could not remember what. He could not remember a thing other than his destination.

O'Hara did not sleep. He was still in a haze of milling blades, whirling jungle, yelling Moros. He scarcely felt the breeze. He did not hear the lap of the waves, the creaking of rigging as the matting sail rose on its yards, bellied out.

Then there was a yell which was not a hangover from flight. Gin Mike croaked, "Hey, you—"

The skipper screeched. The boat shuddered. O'Hara started, and instinctively reached for his pistol. But he had lost it, probably where they had last drunk.

A motor launch had smashed the outrigger of the *prahu*. Buck Worley stood up in the rocking boat. As Gin Mike tried to go over the side, the derelict raised a muzzle-loading gun. Its charge of scrap iron and black powder did not miss fire.

Gin Mike collapsed. Bluish smoke swirled. O'Hara, half on his feet, stumbled across the screeching skipper.

"I got him!" Buck Worley cried. "You couldn't throw me off that way—I heard—"

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He giggled, and then the motor sputtered to life. The stolen launch tore off what remained of the outrigger, and Worley headed across Illana Bay.

GIN MIKE was finished when O'Hara got to him. Bit by bit it all came back to O'Hara. He had planted the seeds of this vengeance. Then he had tried to tell Gin Mike to stay away from Parang. After running the gauntlet, he had wanted to save the renegade, but his battered head had betrayed him.

And Buck Worley, gone native long enough to tune in on the jungle telegraph, had learned of the commotion at Anting-Anting. He had stolen a boat and gone to wait for his enemy.

When O'Hara reported to Major Hobart, he said, "A white man finished Gin Mike. The Chino saw that, and he'll spread the news. I guess everybody's face is saved. I didn't have my gun. If I'd had it, I couldn't have hit a thing. He was crazy drunk, Buck was."

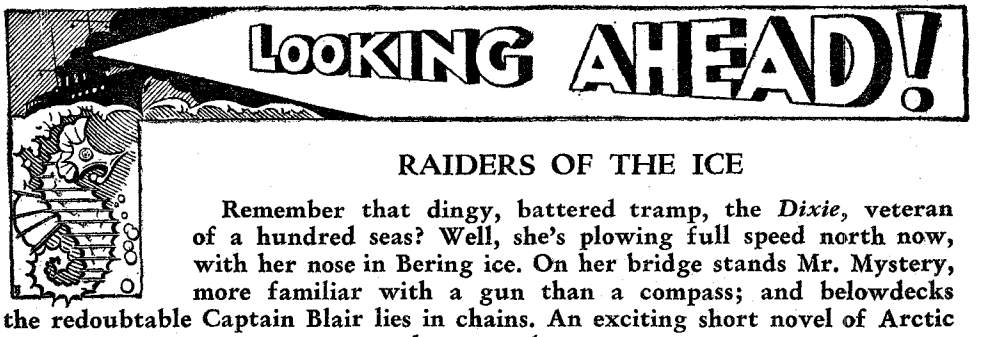
"So it was Buck Worley?" Major Hobart stared over O'Hara's head, and smoothed his khaki blouse. He patted the campaign badges exactly flush with the starched gray surface. Then he looked down and smiled a little. "I was depending on you to tell him something."

"Listen—" O'Hara took a step forward, raised a hand. Then he halted, and shrugged. "Mike and I rushed that patrol—"

"I think I know how you feel," the major said. "But that's part of the game. You've prevented a nasty uprising. Datu Garci will hear that Gin Mike's finished. Very good, very good indeed. And so you lost your pistol . . ."

"Saving face!" O'Hara spat the words.

But Major Hobart was not yet through. "Just a minute," he said. "Officially, there wasn't any skirmish, so I can't survey your pistol as lost in action. It will have to be deducted from your next pay voucher. That's all, O'Hara. Except that if you persist in going to Sugut after dark, I'll have to move you and the young lady into quarters here in Parang."



RAIDERS OF THE ICE

Remember that dingy, battered tramp, the *Dixie*, veteran of a hundred seas? Well, she's plowing full speed north now, with her nose in Bering ice. On her bridge stands Mr. Mystery, more familiar with a gun than a compass; and belowdecks the redoubtable Captain Blair lies in chains. An exciting short novel of Arctic adventure, by

ROY DE S. HORN

ALSO FINE FICTION BY CHARLES JACKSON, JACK MANN, ROBERT GRIFFITH, AND OTHERS

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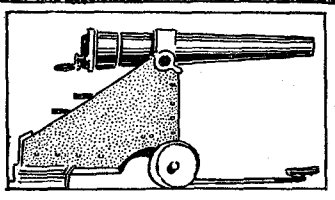
LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : by W·A·WINDAS



·BREECH LOADERS·

Practically all modern fire-arms are loaded from the breech end. The muzzle-loader has long been obsolete. Strangely enough, when gunpowder was first coming into use, nearly all early cannon were breech-loaders, but breech actions were not strong hence muzzle-loaders were adopted when high-power weapons were wanted.

·FIRST PRACTICAL UNIFORM·

The British "Rifle Regiments" (raised in America 1755) adopted GREEN instead of the traditional infantry RED for their coats, to blend with the American forests. This was the first time since the days of armor that utility, rather than looks was considered in designing uniforms...

·FIRST CARTRIDGES·

Cartridges were first used by the army of King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden. The King designed them so that his men could reload faster.

·LARIAT·

Lariats were not originated as cowboy tools, but as weapons for Hunnish cavalry. The Huns used them to pull enemy horsemen from their saddles. . .

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Jim lay over the cannon, and fourteen sophomores lined up behind him, hefting their paddles

The Ringer

By CHARLES RICE McDOWELL

WHEN Min Deederick's hulking twenty-two-year-old, athletically-minded boy Jim began to turn into a professional prize-fighter, Min rebelled. She remembered what the ring had done to Jim's pa. Jim was a fireman's helper on the freights, and before the boxing notion had struck him, he had dreamed of becoming a first-line engineer.

With the help of the town's most influential citizen, Mr. Toleson, an alumnus of S.E.U., Min got Jim back into the high school that had given him up as hopeless several years before. Then, by adroit juggling of Jim's credits, he sent him to O.M.A., Southern's farmout prep school. All this Mr. Toleson did because he was genuinely fond of spitfire Min and because he knew how well S.E.U. could use a healthy gridman like Jim.

At O.M.A. Jim roomed with slight, smart, cynical Ted Wendell. The boys became close friends; patiently Wendell showed Jim how to learn things so he could both understand and remember them; cagily Jim goaded Wendell into becoming a promising trackman.

COACH NELSON and President Handiwell (pronounced Honeywool) of S.E.U. manage to wangle Jim the full scholarship, board and spending-money jobs that he will need. Nelson is delighted with Jim and allows him more say-so than the others. "In fact," he thinks, "that crazy goon might make a great coach out of me some day."

At a faculty meeting, Handiwell adroitly sidesteps the issue, raised by foxy, sour Dr. Pickens, of whether S.E.U.'s "Handiwell Plan" is not coming dangerously close to pure professionalism, and depriving more deserving students of the scholarships they should have. Just as adroitly, Handiwell talks four mutinous alumni out of bringing up the question of open subsidization at the banquet that night.

This story began in the Argosy for July 22

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Hunk Blevins, the freshman coach, has his problems too. He has given out the last of the jobs he controls to a mediocre grid-man, Bell; and at the last moment a far superior end, Ingerton, turns up. Blevins decides to get rid of Bell, who has already played in one S.E.U. freshman game and is thereby ineligible to play at any other college that fall.

At practice that afternoon, Blevins runs all his plays through Bell, half-killing him in the process. When Bell can't take it any more, Blevins labels him yellow, goading him into open insubordination.

"Turn in your uniform," he tells Bell coldly; and Bell is through with football . . . through with college.

Jim, having watched the whole thing, attempts to set the matter straight with Coach Nelson, who refuses to listen, and advises Jim not to be so free with his opinions.

That night, an angry and disappointed Jim hops the rods heading for home. . . .

CHAPTER XI

ROPE THE MAVERICK

SLICK NELSON told Millie after supper what Jim had said about Hunk's treatment of Sam Bell. "I can't believe Hunk would do a thing like that," he said, shaking his head.

"I think he'd knock you or anybody else in the head for twenty-five cents if he was sure he wouldn't be caught," his wife replied.

"Millie, don't you trust Hunk?"

"Not as far as I could throw a bull by the tail, and you don't either, but you think it's your duty to protect your coaches, right or wrong."

"Well, shouldn't I?"

"Not if they're wrong."

"But the whole morale would break down, Millie, if I admitted I ever thought—"

"Pshaw, I wish you were out of the whole rotten racket. The tyranny you coaches maintain over the lives of your players is the most complete that exists in the world today. It's positively horrible to think of it. You put them in games so they can't ever be eligible to play anywhere else. Then you bully them brutally. They have to take it because football is their life. You make sycophants out of them before you allow them to display their great guts. You couldn't make one out of Deederick and that's what's hurting you."

Slick bit his lips. "Oh, Millie, I don't know what to do."

"I know what you'll do. You'll keep Deederick at any cost. You know he's worth the whole lot of them. You can't afford to lose him. If he were an ordinary player, you'd run him out of town; but he's a star. You'll give in."

Slick had stopped listening to Millie. She didn't understand anything about coaching. He went to the phone and rang the Athletic House and asked for Jim Deederick. Millie heard him say, "Gone? What? Gone where?" She heard him ask for Waller. After a moment's pause she heard him say desperately, "Gone home! You mean gone back to Oakdell? My God."

Slick ran down the cellar steps into the garage. Millie heard the car start. She felt sure Slick would come back with Deederick if he had to go to Oakdell. She laughed as she wondered how he could think it was so important, but she loved him because she felt so confident he would bring back Jim Deederick or anything else he went for.

AS THE *Royal Flier* pulled through Coal Mountain tunnel and started up the grade, Jim Deederick lay flat on his stomach on top of the baggage car, one hand warming in his coat while the other held on.

A hundred miles behind a big Buick roared down through the long, straight lines of pines at eighty miles an hour. Slick was at the wheel. Beside him sat a long-legged boy with a sharp nose and horn-rimmed glasses. On the rear seat, wrapped in a blanket, Frog Waller slept peacefully. The Royal Flier would be stopped at Carrollton, and Jim arrested and put in jail. It had been Ted's idea.

The cops pulled Jim off the blinds in Carrollton at ten thirty-five. Jim didn't

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resist. He went to sleep with his clothes on in the Carroll County jail, wondering how long he was in for. Anyway, he wouldn't have to go back to S.E.U. He assumed it would be at least ninety days.

At daylight there came to Jim in his muddled dreams the sensation that someone was holding his hand and stroking his hair. "Min," he muttered, as he opened his eyes.

"I hate to wake you, Jim," the Frog said. "I hate to wake you when you're sleepin' so good here in this nice warm jail."

Jim grinned and slapped at the Frog affectionately. He sat up and looked around. Ted was standing by the cot grinning at him. He reached out with his left hand and gripped Ted's. "Hello, kid." He choked. He knew Ted wanted him back because he was Jim and not because he was a football player. Slick stood at the foot of the cot wearing a poker face.

Jim turned to Slick and looked at him with a cold eye. "You figured to make it pretty tough on me, didn't you, Mr. Nelson? Bringing these boys along."

Slick tried to turn it off. "Bring him along, men," he laughed, starting to go. He had everything fixed with the jailer. Buck Crawford was prosecuting attorney in Carrollton, and Buck had played at S.E.U. in 1914.

Jim asked Frog and Ted to wait in the car. He wanted to talk to Slick alone. They sat down together on the steps of the jail, and Jim wiped the cinders out of his eyes with the heel of his hand.

"Look-a-here, Mr. Nelson, I want to go back. You know that. But before I do, I got to be sure there's goner be straight shootin'. I ain't goner be mixed up in the kind of dirty stuff I saw pulled up there at S.E.U. yesterday. That guy Blevins is a louse."

Slick saw it was useless to try to defend Hunk. "Jim, I'm going to tell you something in confidence."

"Yes, sir."

"Can you keep it?"

"Sure, I can."

"Well, some of us don't trust Hunk any more than you do, see? But his contract has another year. I hope that will be his last. We've got to keep him this year, but I've decided what to do. I'm going to take him with me to help with the Varsity. He knows football and can help a lot, but I'm not going to leave him in charge of you freshmen when three or four of you have lost confidence in him. I'll send Chip Twineford over to take charge of you boys. You'll all like Chip. How's that—does that satisfy you?"

"Not quite, coach. What you gonna do about Sam Bell? He got an awful raw deal."

"I can take care of that. We're going to fix him up with Wible at Harding."

"Will he be eligible?"

"Sure. The game he played in wasn't a conference game. It won't count under their rules. That's where Bell went. He's down there now."

"All right, coach. I'm ready to go," Jim said.

CHAPTER XII

KITCHEN ARTIST

JIM had learned the art of dishwashing early in the kitchen of Min's depot restaurant in Oakdell. He had learned it before he remembered anything. So far as he knew he was a born dishwasher. Min always said that Jim never needed no rattler when he was a baby because she just gave him saucers and dish towels to work on when he was fretful.

When the brakemen used to get cups with nicks in them, they always told Min to bring a cup Jim hadn't been teethin' on. They swore Jim bit nicks out of the cups with his baby teeth.

By the time Jim was ten years old he had his own theories about dishwashing. The rudimentary idea was that you must never mix your plates. All plates of the same size had to be stacked together, all saucers together, all cups together. Even knives and forks and spoons had to be in separate piles.

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Half-eaten buns were used to swipe gravy off the plates. After being swiped, the greasy plates went into boiling water to soak. Glasses and cups and saucers all went into separate pans. Forks went in one pan, knives into another, spoons into another. A pan for everything and everything in its pan; it was the unpardonable sin to mix 'em up.

Jim would keep records on himself for washing a day's dishes and mark it on the wall. He invented a special technique for drying knives.

He would pick up about thirty knives in a big towel, and using a down stroke on the blade with his right, he would pull the handle through the towel-covered fingers of his left hand as he threw the knife into the tray. He developed such skill that the knives poured out in a steady stream, the more noise the better. It sounded something like a machine gun firing when Jim was drying knives.

So many railroaders used to come back in the kitchen to watch him that Min would have to shoo them out.

As the years passed Jim had added to his show. By the time he was twelve he could juggle a fork, a spoon and a cup.

By the time he was fifteen he had added an egg and when he was sixteen he ended by catching the egg behind his back. He had had to practice with the egg beside a feather bed.

It had been several years since Jim had been professionally engaged in dishwashing when he entered the University.

He hadn't been anxious to display his talents, but it was simply in the cards. Most of the beanery bulls were willing enough to wait on tables. It gave them a chance to eat first and get the best of it, but they resented washing or drying dishes. The boys gave Miss Belle so much trouble that she was repeatedly in tears.

Frog Waller got out of helping with the dishes by pretending to be so awkward that he couldn't help dropping them. At the end of the first week, Frog had broken so many plates he had been assigned the job of sweeping under tables.

Of course Frog had dropped more plates than he had broken, for they were so thick they seldom broke. They'd never break if you dropped them on the linoleum, but there was one humpy place in the concrete over the drain where they broke nicely.

Frog soon learned to stand over that spot while wiping.

Others learned Frog's trick and the breakage became intolerable. Miss Belle having heard one too many crashes had fled to the office by the pantry, sobbing. Jim followed Miss Belle to her den. He brought her a glass of cold water and patted her just as he always did Min when she blew up. He assured her he would straighten things out.

HE hung up his coat and walked into the kitchen and banged his fist on the sink. "The next rat that breaks a dish is goner get his head broke, see? Get these dishes dry and get this place cleaned up. You're runnin' Miss Belle nuts." Jim took off his shirt, pushed the dishwasher out of the way and plunged elbow deep into the hot water.

Most of the bull necks were impressed; they stood staring at each other in amazement. Their hands gripped the plates a little harder as they saw the play of muscle in Jim's back.

A little rebellious rankle gnawed at Cowboy Ingerton's middle.

He knew Jim didn't like it about his getting Sam Bell's job. He didn't like the way Jim tried to run everything, anyway. He'd been used to running things himself where he came from, and he hadn't met the guy yet who could get him told.

Ingerton walked over to the drain and dropped a soup plate. Jim heard the crash and wheeled around. He stepped toward Ingerton, wiping the suds down his arms ominously. Ingerton let fly a heavy coffee cup. Jim's head moved slightly to the side and the cup shattered against the wall.

Jim came on.

Ingerton threw a haymaker, but missed. Jim grabbed him by the neck and shook him as a dog shakes a mole. He bent him

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over the table and slapped his head with his open hand. The blow jarred Ingerton's spine and his resistance wilted. Jim lifted him to the table, sat him down and turned him loose.

"Look-a-here, Ingy, you're a good-looking boy. You've a good-looking face, see? Your nose is still straight and your teeth are good. You don't want your nose knocked down like mine, do you, son? If you ever make me hit you, you won't never look the same, see?"

The scowl left Jim's countenance and his big face grew sweet. "I won't never hit you, son, unless you make me, see? I ain't got nuthin' agin you. Me and you are goner get along. We're goner play on the same blame football team and we're goner stick together and win a lot of games. I'm sorry I slapped you, son."

Jim held out his hand and grinned. Ingy didn't like the son-stuff, but he did like the look on Jim's face. "Okay, pappy," he said, "shake."

"That's the stuff, boy. Come on, let's git finished up with these dishes. I wanter show you guys a trick or two when I'm through."

Jim finished the washing and dried his hands. He pitched up a teacup and caught it behind his back. He dropped the cup and caught it on his toe and flipped it over his head and caught it again behind him.

"A guy's got to be pretty awkward to ever break a dish," Jim said. "You-all don't wanter be as awkward as Frog."

"Is that the trick you promised to do?" Frog said. "It ain't much."

"Shucks, no. Bring me a fork and a spoon and an egg; I got a teacup."

Jim took them and put them on the table. First he sent the fork and spoon tumbling over and over each other in the air and then the teacup was introduced. A circle of admiring beanery bulls held their breath in admiration. Jim reached for the egg. As it went up and tumbled over and over with the cup and fork and spoon, breathing entirely ceased.

For a half minute the pieces of tableware and the egg went up from Jim's palms and flowed over each other with the grace of a fountain. The spoon and the fork and the teacup came to rest in his left hand; the egg went high and came to rest softly in Jim's hand behind his back.

"Well, I'm a lowdown dog," the beanery chorused, as Jim put the egg in the teacup.

"Men," Jim said, "this all goes to show that kitchen work is reely a art."

Jim lectured his captivated audience on his theories of washing dishes. He said he planned to introduce his methods and everybody would get through twenty minutes earlier. The beanery boys were ready to believe that Jim knew his kitchen stuff.

Miss Belle had observed the *coup d' état* through the crack in the door. She sensed that there was going to be orderly government in the beanery for the first time in thirteen years. Maybe there was going to be an era of good feeling. She silently prayed for a continuance of the established order, and thanked the Lord for sending her Jim Deederick.

Jim left the beanery and walked over to the Co-op to perform his duties there. He hung up his coat and stepped behind the book counter. A student approached and asked for a Greencastle and Middleborough on Elements of Seventeenth Centurn Prose. Jim found the heavy, dark green book and handed it over.

"How much is it?" asked the boy.

Jim studied the price list a long time, finally he replied, "Five dollars and a quarter."

"Five dollars and a quarter! That's outrageous."

Jim shrugged.

"That's the price, son."

"How do you explain charging such a price as that?"

Jim thought about the matter carefully. There must be some reason. He looked at the two names on the cover, and light dawned.

He grinned and said:

"I tell you, son, how it is. When you go to buy a book wrote by two writers, it's just low down murder!"

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CHAPTER XIII

A POLITICIAN IS BORN

"TED, I ain't goner wear this silly freshman hat to town," Jim said, looking at himself in the glass.

"You better wear it. What are you going to town for, anyway? Do country boys always have to go to town?"

"I been doin' some buyin' for Miss Belle lately, since she found out I know my groceries. I'm goin' up to the A & P now and get her some green stuff."

"Why don't you want to wear your cap, Deedy?"

"My face is too old lookin'. I look so jeepsawful silly with it on."

"You don't look any worse than anybody else."

"I do, too. They look tolable cute on the seventeen-year-olders, but I'm too big-faced and old lookin'."

"You're lettin' Ingy and Frog get your goat with that pappy stuff. You look all right with your cap on."

"Ted, I wouldn't look any simpler if I put on a low neck dress and a pearl necklace."

"Haven't you been wearing it all over the campus?"

"I don't care how silly I look over here around them kids on the campus, but I don't like to go up around the stores wearin' the looney thing. Everybody notices me and the clerks look at me like they're tryin' not to laugh. Nuts, I ain't goner wear it."

"Now, Deedy, don't be a fool. You'll get in trouble with the sophomore vigilance committee. They'll whip you on the cannon."

"They wouldn't do that, Ted. They'd have sense enough to understand."

"That's just the point. They haven't got sense enough to understand anything."

"I'll bet you they wouldn't bother me."

"Yes, they would. They'd jump you quicker than anybody else and then you'd fight and knock the livers out of somebody and then there'd be a lot of trouble. Don't you go anywhere without it."

Jim picked up the cap and put it on. He looked at himself from every angle. He ended by throwing it down. "Holy cat, Ted, it won't do." He started toward the door.

Ted stood up and held the door shut. "Please, Deedy, don't be a damn fool. You're going to get in trouble and then you're going to fight when they try to whip you and then somebody'll get hurt and there'll be sin to pay. They'd be sure to jump you because they'd be afraid people would say they were afraid of a football player if they didn't."

"I never thought of that. Well, let 'em whip me. It wouldn't kill me. I wouldn't fight. I'd let 'em whip me."

"Say, Jim, did that little cash register girl up at the A & P laugh at you?"

"Yeah, a little." Jim blushed.

"Well, she's married. Go on and wear your cap."

"So she's married. Anyway, Ted, I ain't goner wear it. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I promise you on my honor I won't fight if they whup my britches off."

"All right, then, go ahead." Ted opened the door. "I hope they do. You're a great big baby that can't take it. You haven't got guts enough to stand a little red-headed married woman laughing at you."

Jim stopped. Haven't got guts enough —he started back for his cap. Then he stopped. "Anyway, I got guts enough to take my lickin' without fightin' if they ketch me."

"All right, go ahead, and hush. The whole damn town will be talking about how handsome you look without the freshman hat."

TED picked up the silly little cap that Jim had left on the dresser and turned it over. It looked like a little blue tea saucer with a short, willy brim and a white button. Ted admired Jim for not wearing it. He thought for a moment that he'd like to die for Jim's right not to wear it.

Then he laughed at himself. The big sap will probably talk 'em out of whipping him somehow, even if they catch him. Every-

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thing awful always almost happens to Deedy, but nothing ever quite does.

When Jim came out of the A & P, four serious-looking young collegians were waiting for him. They always caught 'em. The Vigilance Committee didn't have much else to do.

"Aren't you Jim Deederick?"

"Yeah," Jim replied, hunching to balance the heavy bags under his arms.

"A freshman, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

"You mean yes, sir. My name's Villig. I'm chairman of the Sophomore Vigilance Committee."

"Yeah."

"Yes, sir. Why aren't you wearing your freshman cap?"

"I'm too big—" Jim was trying to say he was too big-faced and old lookin'.

"You're too what?" Villig interrupted violently. "You come with us."

"I ain't got time now, son. I gotta take this stuff to Miss Belle over to the beanery." Jim proceeded toward the beanery Ford and pushed his bags through the window and stepped into the front seat. Villig and his comrades rushed up beside the car.

"You are ordered to report to the Armory tonight at twelve o'clock in front of the cannon."

"Can't you make it a little earlier, son? I'm out for football, and I'm supposed to turn in before eleven."

"I said twelve o'clock."

"I wisht you'd make it earlier if it would be just as convenient for everybody. I'm supposed to hit the hay before eleven."

"I said twelve."

"You're goner beat me, ain't you?"

"We certainly are."

"You gotta whup any more freshmen?"

"That's none of your business."

"Well, I wisht you'd make mine first, son, 'cause I gotta git to bed."

Jim saw that one of the four members of the committee was a little amused. Jim winked at him in a friendly way without knowing why. Villig's rage overpowered him when he saw the wink.

"You'd better be there, and you'd better be on time, and it'll be fifteen licks—not ten—and you'd better not make any trouble."

"I won't make you no trouble, son. I promised I wouldn't. Don't you-all be late 'cause I gotta git to bed." Jim let in the clutch and the beanery Ford moved off, leaving Villig and his companions standing in the street.

WHEN Ted left the library at a quarter of twelve he wondered why Jim's light was on and went up to see. Frog and Ingy were asleep in the lower bunks and Jim was standing in his shorts with a pair of trousers in his hands.

"Going to bed, Jim?"

"Naw, I was just feelin' Frog's pants to se if they were any thicker than mine. They're goner whup me at twelve o'clock. You can come over and see it if you think you'd enjoy it."

"No, I don't care to see it. But you brought it on yourself."

"Min always told me it was bad manners to say I told you so when a feller got in bad by his own doin'."

"Well, good luck, Jim," Ted said. "Remember you promised not to fight."

"Don't worry, Ted. I won't. I know I brung it on myself."

At five minutes before twelve, Slick Nelson came down the steps in his bare feet to answer the phone. He mumbled oaths as he came. "Who in blazes's calling me this time of night. Hello—"

"Hello, Mr. Nelson, this is Ted Wendell. The Sophomore Vigilance Committee is going to whip Jim Deederick on the cannon in about five minutes for not wearing a freshman cap. They're gathering in front of the Armory now."

Slick banged up the phone and ran for his pants and shoes. Within two minutes the Buick would be tearing past stop lights in the direction of the Armory.

. . . Jim was leaning on the cannon when the Vigilance Committee arrived. Jim wondered why so many had to come.

"Hello, boys," he said huskily.

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No one answered. They surrounded him as if they expected him to run. Jim began unbuttoning his belt.

"What are you doing," Villig asked.

"Don't I have to take down my pants?"

"No, of course not," Villig replied stiffly. "Deederick, it is customary to allow the offender to say a few words in mitigation of the offense. Have you anything to say?"

"I'd like to ask a favor."

"What is it?"

"Will you ask whoever it is that's goner do the swingin' to sorta work high up? I'm a football player and I'd sorta hate to git my legs bruised this close to a game." A little titter went around the circle.

"Take your places, men," Villig said.

Fourteen sophomores with paddles rowed up behind him and Jim lay across the breach end of the cannon as directed and lifted his buttocks high. Villig brought down his paddle with a blow that hurt. The next two licks were easy. Jim knew they weren't meant to hurt. The fourth scared Jim; it seemed to tear into his leg. The next two were easy.

Just then the lights of an automobile struck across Jim's eyes. A big car was coming straight over the sidewalk toward the cannon. The siren was shrieking.

In an instant a big man had jumped out and was running toward the group, wearing street trousers and pajama shirt. The boys stepped back. They kept getting behind each other.

Slick jerked the paddle out of Villig's hand and began to brandish it wildly. "Get up and get in that car," he yelled at Jim. As the crowd melted away into the darkness, Villig tried to argue with Slick, but Slick roared at him that if he said any more he'd take him by the nape of the neck and drag him before the Dean.

Villig left, muttering sullenly.

Jim followed Slick to the car and Slick took him to the Athletic House and had him take off his pants. He examined Jim's legs and gave a sigh of relief. "How's a man going to give the fools a team when they haven't any more sense than to beat up his quarterback's legs?" he mumbled.

THE following morning most of the beanery boys came to breakfast without their caps out of loyalty to Jim and a few of the bumpy-faced boys from the dorm, future Phi Beta Kappas, who loved injustice as old women love sorrow, put their caps in their pockets. Sedition was in the air, the beginning of a rebellion. A young communist from Joisey City had already begun organizing a revolt when Ted arrived. Jim hadn't noticed anything, but Ted sensed the tension in the air. He called Jim into Miss Belle's office and explained that a wholesale fight between the freshmen and sophomores was being incubated there in the beanery.

"Shucks, I can't help it," Jim said.

"You're the only person who can stop it."

"What could I do?"

"You go out there and bang on the table and make 'em a speech and ask them not to leave off their caps."

"Ted, I can't make no sorta speech. But I'll try. What you want me to tell 'em?"

"Tell them you were wrong. Tell them that you are going to be proud to wear your cap. Tell them it's the symbol of the best class in S.E.U."

"Okay, Ted, okay. When do you want me to do it, Ted?"

"Right now, before some of those chokers guzzle their food and go."

Jim walked out in the middle of the beanery floor and banged a water pitcher with a knife.

"Boys," he began, "I wanter make you a little talk." Five hundred freshmen and a few upper classmen were silent.

"Maybe all you boys heard about me gittin' a whuppin' on the cannon last night. Well, I brung it all on mysef. I ain't got nobody to blame but mysef. I oughter of wore it. I know that now.

"I ain't got nuttin' again the cap. I think it looks damn cute on you boys, but I kinder got a idee that it looked sorter outer place on me. I thought I was too big-faced and old lookin' to be wearin' the simple little thing. I looked at mysef in the glass and it put me in mind of an ole horse

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mule poking his head over the door of a stall.

"I know now it wasn't no fault of the cap. It's a nice little cap and it don't reely make a feller look no different from the way Goddlemighty made him look. It just ain't big enough to hide nuthin' about a feller's looks. I may be wrong, but I kinder feel like the best thing for a newcomer to do is to let the folks on the ground run things to suit themselves till he's been around a while.

"I got to admit that I don't see a bit of sense in a feller havin' to wear a cap like that without no brim, but I ain't runnin' this college and I've decided to do as I'm told till I been around here a while. I'm goner wear my cap and I hope you guys will wear your'n. We don't wanter start off the year by fightin' and raisin' ructions.

"Then there was sump'n else I wanted to say. Le's see—aw, yeah—it was this. When I'm walkin' around the campus and see a guy that ain't got on a freshman cap, I don't know what class he's in, but when I see a feller with one of 'em on, I know he's in my class; he's just a pore ignorant freshman like me.

"I know he's goner be around S.E.U. for four years, same as me—if I pass my work—and I feel like gittin' acquainted with that guy. It's sorter like a lodge button; it means you're in the same boat. It means you're in the same outfit, see? It means you're on the same side. I'm for all of us wearin' our caps and stickin' together—"

Jim ran down and didn't know how to finish. Suddenly he remembered what the preacher's boy said in his valedictory at Oakdell High School.

"And—and we're goner make this class the best danged class that's ever been in S.E.U."

As Jim finished his sermon in tones that would have done his grandpa credit on any corner in Oakdell, it was greeted with wild applause. Frog Waller expressed his unrestrained admiration by hurling a hard roll at the speaker, and Jim bowed himself out in a shower of rolls and bread.

Not only was the cap rebellion ended, but Jim Deederick had suddenly become a political figure at S.E.U. He had emerged from the whipping incident the hero of a bloc that would be hard to beat—the bull-necks, the beanery boys and the bumpy-faced boys from the dorm who were destined to wear the keys.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MILLS OF THE GODS

THE beanery boys were supposed to report to the kitchen at seven o'clock, but Jim reported at six-thirty. Miss Belle gave Jim seven dollars a week for coming a half hour early and for going to the grocery for her once a day.

Jim often got to the beanery by six-fifteen. He wasn't in the habit of sleeping after five o'clock anyway. The seven-dollar income put him in pocket money.

Jim always bet all he had on the freshman games. Min had always said that a boy that wasn't willin' to bet on hisself never had no business in a game.

After the first game, Jim had fourteen dollars. He had made three touchdowns himself. This was the most money he'd had since he came to S.E.U., so he blew himself to a pup that cost three dollars. It was a friendly-looking pup and was real cute with a twine-string around its neck. Besides, he looked like he might grow up to be a good night dog.

Miss Belle let Jim keep him under the kitchen of the beanery. He forgot to name him, but called him puppoo, so Puppoo became his name.

By the time the freshmen played the Aggies, Jim had fifty dollars. He had gone over to Norton with Chip Twineford to see the Aggies play Dobbs, and while he was waiting for Chip in a drug store he heard some big-talking guys discussing the freshman game between S.E.U. and the Aggies. Jim listened to them intently for a while. They seemed to think this fellow Deederick was good, but that the Aggies would stop him.

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Jim reached in his pocket and pulled out his fifty dollars. Jim never had kept money in banks; he always carried whatever he had. "Mister, I'll bet you this on the S.E.U. freshmen."

They took Jim up. "If you'll make it two to one, I'll bet you the fifty that Deederick makes more points than the Aggies." The guys liked that better. They left the money next door at Mannini's poolroom, and after the money was in the safe, one of the big-talking guys introduced himself. "My name's Smock; I travel for Belknap out of Louervul."

"My name's Deederick," Jim replied, shaking hands.

"Are you kin to Jim Deederick?" Smock asked.

"Unh-uh," Jim replied.

"Just like the name, eh?"

"No, I'm Jim Deederick."

"Well, you cocky son of a gun."

Jim laughed. "T'ain't no harm in believin' in yoursef, is it, friend?"

"Hell, naw. More power to you." Smock looked Jim over carefully and then went down to Silliman's poolroom, looking for a hundred dollars on S.E.U., much as he hated to hedge a bet.

Jim bet the hundred he won in the Aggie game at one to two in the final game with Durham U., and won again. He lost his scholarship at the end of the year on account of bad grades, but it didn't make any difference. He would have enough money to pay his own tuition for the first semester of the next year.

THE first week of June was the most nervewracking time of year for S.E.U. coaches. A sophomore player, to be eligible, had to get a D average for the freshman year. Jim had made three D's, one E and a C the first semester.

On the third of June the registrar's office showed that Jim had three D's and an E for the second semester, and one grade hadn't come in. It would have to be a C or Jim wouldn't be eligible. It was the English grade that hadn't been turned in yet.

Of course, grades were kept entirely secret until all grades were posted, but Miss Maude had some way of finding out grades of football players. She used to work in the registrar's office, and had friends over there.

Miss Maude told Slick that Deederick was out if he didn't get a C in English. Slick's face fell. He knew English was Jim's weakness. Although Jim's appearance and manners were getting better, his English hadn't improved a bit.

Miss Maude added, "His instructor in English is Carter Douglas."

Slick wheeled on her. "I don't want to know who his instructor is. I've got some decency left. I wouldn't try to influence a teacher to raise a grade."

Slick went in his office and slammed the door. He sat down and gripped his head with his fingers and pressed hard. He knew he had to have Deederick to win football games next fall. He knew he wouldn't get a renewal of his contract if he didn't win. He knew Millie was right. He ought to get out of the dirty racket.

He wondered if he shouldn't have stayed in the air service. He'd be a major now if he had, coming up for a lieutenant-colonelcy soon. He'd gotten out on account of Millie.

He didn't know anything about insurance or stocks. He didn't have any scruples against helping poor boys through college. The purity business was all rot and the petty crookedness was a result of official university hypocricy. It wasn't his fault. But changing grades or putting pressure on teachers to pass dumb boys was too much. Slick had rather be fired than do that.

Shep opened Slick's door and started to speak to him. He saw Slick was in no mood to talk about equipment and he closed the door quietly and walked into Miss Maude's office.

"What's the matter with Coach?"

"It's Deederick. He's got to have a C in English to be eligible. It looks like he's out."

"Who is his instructor?"

"Carter Douglas."

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SHEP went out on the gymnasium steps and sat down. He knew he'd have to act quick. He knew this information had to get to one man, and that man was F. Wadlington Handiwell. Over beyond the hedge by the president's house, a Negro in uniform was polishing the metal work on a Packard car.

Shep walked over that way.

"Hello, Mr. Shep," William said, dropping his rag on the fender. Shep and William conversed quietly a few minutes and Shep went on his way.

He was pretty sure now that something would happen quickly.

In a moment, the Packard moved out of the yard in the direction of the Administration Building. William was going after the president to bring him home for lunch.

On the return trip, William volunteered that it looked like Mist' Deederick wasn't goner be eligible on account of he already had three D's and an E. Dr. Handiwell didn't reply.

" 'Course, if 'Fessor Douglas give him a C he'd be elergerble then," William continued.

"Professors can't *give* students anything, William. Students either make their grades at S.E.U. or they don't get them. Students aren't given anything at this University."

"Yassir, I know. I meant Mr. Deederick would be elergerble if he made a C without no hep."

Dr. Handiwell phoned Miss Macey to cancel his engagement to speak to the Washington Alumni Association. "Try to get in touch with Dean Quisenberry and see if he can go," he added.

Dr. Handiwell thought fast.

Douglas had repeatedly asked for a promotion from instructor to assistant professor, and Mrs. Douglas was going to have a baby. The pressure was available, but the approach was a little baffling. The third cup of coffee brought inspiration.

Dr. Handiwell omitted his nap.

When he arrived at his office, Instructor Douglas was waiting for him in the anteroom. Miss Macey had been efficient.

"Come in, Carter," the president said cordially. He put his big arm around the young man and led him through the holy of holies, back into the holiest of all holies, his own private office.

"It's about the matter of your promotion, Carter. I've been trying to work this matter out. I've wanted to promote you for a long time and I've wanted to relieve you of that evening work you've been doing with the debating sections. I think the married men wherever possible ought to be relieved of evening classroom work."

"If you'll pardon my mentioning such an intimate matter, Dr. Honeywool, we are expecting an addition to the family, and I should like to be at home in the evenings as much as possible."

"Well, congratulations. I am delighted to hear that. Now, I have talked with the head of your department, and he says that the only man he would be willing to have take over your debating sections is Thatcher."

"Yes, Thatcher would handle the work very well. He was on the debating team at the University of Chicago. He is very much interested in that kind of work."

"The only difficulty is that he is already teaching fifteen hours and he is acting as proctor in one of the freshman dormitories. If he could be relieved of this responsibility in the dormitory, I could relieve you of the debating sections, but I can't think who could be put in the Jefferson Davis dormitory."

Dr. Handiwell rang for Miss Macey and asked for a list of instructors.

After reading the list carefully, Dr. Handiwell shook his head disappointedly. "I'm afraid there isn't anyone on this list."

Carter Douglas' face grew tense, but he remained silent.

Dr. Handiwell seemed to think aloud. "Perhaps we could use some older student who would command the respect of the younger boys . . . Oh, I know, Carter, I might put James Deederick over there in the Jefferson Davis dormitory. He is a boy of exceptional character and is much older than the freshmen. He's as old as

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some of our instructors. He has done a wonderful job in the dining hall; has brought order out of chaos over there, I understand. He's the only student I would want to trust."

"He's a very poor student, Dr. Honeywool."

"Oh, he's an underprivileged fellow, but he tries. I don't know what his grades are, but Dean Quisenberry informs me that he's lost his scholarship. His grades are not all posted, but if he gets any more D's I'm afraid he will be out of school. Too bad.

"Well, suppose we leave it this way—if Deederick comes through safely, I'll give him Thatcher's work as proctor and that will relieve Thatcher so he can take over your work. And I feel sure the executive council will approve your promotion. I'll let you know when Deederick's grades are in. Your freshman grades have already been posted, of course?"

"No, sir."

"Well, well, I shouldn't have mentioned Deederick's grades if I'd known that."

"No, of course not, Dr. Honeywool."

INSTRUCTOR CARTER DOUGLAS decided to reread Jim Deederick's long theme. Perhaps he had read it too hastily and hadn't been quite fair to Deederick. He opened the paper and read:

Raleroaders in Oakdell, Kentucky, all go down to the deepo to see the Dixie Palm go by. Peeple up at Somerset and Danville think they do it because they got nuthing else to do.

That is not so.

We got a good movie in Oakdell and have good Westerns the same as anybody else. They go down to watch her go by because they think she is grate. They are proud of her.

You can hear her go woo-woo way up the track four mile north as she heads out of the tunnel. She lites up the whole holler throwing her lites against the cut. Lord but she is pretty. We like to feel the ground shake under her as he goes by. The women folks all bring thier babies to see her. They name thier babies for Jim Lester. He is the engineer.

He is been more than thirty year with the rode. He is sixty now. He sets in the cabin cocky as a young one with his cap a little side ways on his head. He never missed a run in seven year.

Then he had the flu. Everybody had the flu. It was not his fault. It seems like all the kids in Oakdell is name Jim Lester something. Most folks think I was named for him. My mother says I am not. I wish I was name Jim Lester Deederick. He is the greatest old guy I ever seen. Min knows him personelly.

When I was thirteen I was a call boy for the road. My job was mainly to wake up firemen that stoke slop freights. It is not easy to wake up crew men when they never have enuf sleep. They hit at you a heap while they are waking up. I got a repertation for being hard to hit.

A feller has to get hard to hit when he has been dodging firemen since he was thirteen. I come pretty near going pro like my dad.

My mother did not want me to. Dad got punch drunk. He got hit and killed by number seven. It was because he was listless-like and was not watching out. Min never got no damages.

Min she skeemed up with Mister Coleson to send me to college to keep me from doing pro fiteing. That is how I happened to come to college. Gran says the Lord never ment me for a scholar but here I am trying to write a theme so as I can get elegeble . . ."

Carter Douglas, raised in Brookline, quivered every time his eye hit a misspelled word. "Awful—awful," he groaned aloud, but he kept on reading the story of old Jim Lester's life.

It was a life of smoke and steam and jolts, with a half dozen wrecks thrown in. Old Jim had shot one man over his wife and killed a train robber with a shovel in his early days with the Santa Fe.

Something happened on every page. It was the life of a man who had cooked his bacon in the shovel as his train drove on through the night; a man who slept when it suited and breathed coal dust for sixty healthy years; whose old age had been rewarded with the honor of crashing through the darkness for eight hours at seventy-five miles an hour, drawing a twelve-Pullman train.

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Carter felt like wiping the cinders out of his eyes as he finished. He realized he had enjoyed reading it a second time. At least the damn thing is real, he thought.

Carter Douglas raised Jim's grade on the long theme from D to B and entered his final grade as a C. . . .

"You know, Dr. Honeywool, Mist' Jim Deederick is elergerble. Fesser Douglas give him a C," William volunteered as he drove the president home for dinner.

"*Gave* him—"

"Naw, sir, he made it hissef. Anyway, he's elergerble."

"Did you suppose a petty matter of that sort would interest me, William?"

"Naw, sir. I knowed you wouldn't keer. I knowed you ain't got time to be thinkin' about no sich stuff as that."

CHAPTER XV

WASHED UP

THERE was only one student at S.E.U. who was known to every single man on the campus. It was Gentleman Mike, the sandwich man.

Gentleman Mike carried sandwiches at night into all the dormitories and all the fraternity houses. His sheer ubiquity would have been enough to have made him well known. Half Irish and half Jew, Gentleman Mike was a happy combination of both races. Along with his mother's nose he had inherited her shrewdness, industry and persistent aggressiveness.

With his father's big Irish mouth had come as ingratiating a smile as could be seen on the campus. Out of it flowed constantly as amusing a stream of amiable billingsgate as had been heard at S.E.U. for many a year.

The flat-footed, corpulent figure lumbering about the campus in the deep hours of the night was as familiar as the buildings or the trees. Mike had been born fully introduced to all his fellow humans. It was impossible to pass him without speaking to him, and it was indeed an offish fellow who could pass him without being inveigled into a talk. The only method of closing a conversation was to purchase a sandwich or at least a Hershey bar.

Mike had received the sobriquet "Gentleman" early in his freshman year as a result of his stopping a fist fight between two rather well-known upper classmen. A young man from Evanston, Illinois, with no malice intended, had committed the unpardonable sin. He had carelessly impugned the ancestry of a young gentleman from South Carolina during a poker game at the Sig house.

Although the Yankee had earnestly explained that he meant no reflection upon the character of the South Carolinian's mother, he had not officially unsaid the words by saying "I take it back." This, he stupidly felt, was unnecessary and could not be done without loss of face, once the gentleman from South Carolina had furred up at him.

The Southerner had challenged the Yankee to a duel with fists behind the Sig house. A circle had been formed and the duelists were squaring off when Mike arrived with his basket. He broke through the circle yelling "Chees, youse guys be gennamen!"

Flourishing around between the duelists with his basket, he rendered an interchange of blows impossible, and caused the duel to end in a farce. Thenceforth, he was known as "Gentleman Mike."

Having been shipped twice over the cannon during his freshman year for making impertinent remarks to members of the sophomore class, Gentleman Mike became a little resentful toward the activities of the Vigilance Committee.

At the beginning of their sophomore year, he decided to run Jim Deederick for Chairman of that committee. Through the assistance of Ted, who now wrote a column on the *News* called "As Seen Through Sophomoric Eyes," the campaign was successful.

Jim was thereby made a little political acorn which might grow into something big in student government. Mike got credit for being a political manager who might have to be dealt with some day by the

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Big Clique, which up to this time had dished out all the political patronage.

Jim's first act as Chairman of the Vigilance Committee was to make a speech to the sophomore class in which he urged that it didn't do a bit of good to beat freshmen up. He likened whipping pore little homesick freshmen to healthy chickens pecking a pore, sick chicken to death. The cannon whippings were discontinued.

NEXT, Jim and Gentleman Mike launched an attack on "gauntlet night." It had been the custom on this night to have all the sophomores line up on each side of the diagonal road across the campus, with paddles and pieces of fishing poles.

Every freshman except members of the football squad had to run the gauntlet. Every year some of the freshmen were badly beaten up. It was bad enough to have all the sophomores take a cut at freshmen rears, but it had gotten to be the custom for upper classmen and alumni and even laymen to take part. Corn liquor had complicated the problem further.

Gauntlet night had broken up in a fight during Jim's freshman year. Frog Waller had been the cause of the fight. He would have been excused as a member of the freshman football team if he hadn't shot off his mouth and provoked the sophomores, and they put him in the line with the rest.

That was what Frog wanted them to do. He had planned a little practical joke that he felt sure would be some fun.

He had decided that he would run about thirty yards down the line and get up full speed and then break out of line by running over a couple of sophomores. He hadn't realized that a hundred and ninety pounds going at the speed of a sprinter might hurt somebody. His joke turned out successfully but with about as much fun to the victims as if he had run over them with a car.

The joke resulted in Asa Villig's arm being broken and Pete Lucas being sent to the hospital with a slight concussion from his head striking the concrete curb.

It also resulted in a general fight between the two classes.

The gauntlet was omitted for the first time in thirty-seven years under Jim's régime, and for the first time in the history of the University, a ringer athlete's name was associated with reform in student government.

The general resentment to Jim's interference with University traditions was more or less allayed when Jim accounted for both of the touchdowns that beat the Aggies that year. Resentment of Frog's conduct was also mitigated when it was understood that the coaching staff had said that the Frog's cutting down Red Gentry, the Aggie fullback, had made the second touchdown possible.

Reformers were bad as a class, but reformers that could win football games were tolerated.

Baseball fans had looked forward to a great season with Jim Deederick pitching. He had had a wonderful year as a freshman. He had pitched two no-hit games and fanned out fourteen men in the Aggie game. He had so much steam that he had the cow-milkers' feet in the bucket all afternoon. The sportswriters said that all Deederick needed was a little change of pace to be ready for the big time.

It had looked like S.E.U. was in for three years of good times. The Ingerton-Waller-Deederick football combination would be too much for the cow-milkers. Cushaw McIntosh had laid in so many baskets against the Aggies that the conference heads were agitating changing the basketball rules to keep tall men out of the hole and to abolish the center jump. And now Lefty had a good team and a star pitcher in Deederick.

It was bitter medicine for the fans when Jim had to be taken out of his first game with Maryland Teachers'. His throwing arm was gone. He was wild, didn't have any stuff on the ball, and didn't even have any real steam. After one trial, Lefty and Jim both suspected that he was all washed up. It was the result of one blow that he

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took in the last quarter of the Aggie football game that fall.

Slick had wanted to take Jim out after he had made the second touchdown, but Cap'n Eddie told Slick he mustn't do it. The crowd had come to see Deederick and the crowd had to have its money's worth if they were going to build up the gate and overflow the stands.

They couldn't hope to close the end and make a horseshoe of the stadium unless they could fill the stands they already had. Slick had left Deederick in the game, knowing very well the Aggies were gunning for him.

It was in the last five minutes of the game that the Aggies knocked Jim out.

It was an off-tackle play and Jim was carrying the ball. The tackle and the end set him up, and Red Gentry tackled through him with his two hundred and five pounds, while the end and tackle held him in a twist. Jim woke up in the showers, and an hour later a deep aching in his right shoulder had worried him. He wondered if they had done something to him that might permamently affect his throwing arm.

The night after he was taken out of the box in the game with Maryland Teachers', Jim knew his suspicion was a dreadful farce. He was *all* washed up. He would never pitch big league ball. He would never play baseball of any sort that amounted to very much.

Lefty had talked to Dr. Woodward at the State Hospital about the shoulder and he didn't give Lefty any hope. Jim said nothing at all when Lefty told him, but got Puppoo and went for a walk. He had always supposed that sooner or later he'd end up in the big leagues. He would never be able now to get any of the things for Min he had intended to buy with the proceeds of money ball.

It was the first heartbreaking disappointment that had ever come into his life.

The next afternoon he turned in his suit and reported for track. They might be able to use him on the relay team.

CHAPTER XVI

GLADIATORS' NIGHT

IT WAS the middle of Jim's junior year when Tony Colletti ran into him on the stairs as Jim was leaving basketball practice.

"Jeemie, I hear you done a bit of fighting when you was a youngster."

"Yeah, why?"

"I'd like to work wid you sometime. I hear you're hard to hit."

"Any of 'em can be hit, Tony."

"How come you quit, Jeemie?"

"My mother didn't want me to sign. That's why I'm in college, Tony. It was Min's scheme to keep me out of fightin'. See, dad was in the game and he took too much—was walkin' on his heels before he died."

"How good were you, Jeemie?"

"I was good enough to make the grade, I guess, Tony, but I don't know. I never fought a first-rater. I never had any trouble with street-fair fighters. The pros I've worked with were all a little old."

"Have you got the punch, Jeemie?"

"I know I can hit harder than the general run. I got that from my dad. He must have had a killer of a right hand, but I hear he didn't have much else except guts."

"When would it suit you, Jeemie, to work with me?"

"Sunday would be the only time."

"How about five o'clock?"

"Okay. Sunday at five."

. . . "Say, Cap'n Eddie, you oughta see this Jim Deederick work." Tony beamed as he came in Cap'n Eddie's office Monday morning.

"You mean with the gloves?" Cap'n Eddie asked, looking over his glasses.

"Sure. You ought to see him."

"When did you work with him?"

"Sunday."

"Has he really got the stuff?"

"Chees, yes. You can't hit the guy."

"Can't hit him?"

"I ain't hit him yet. He's lightnin'. First student I ever seen I couldn't hit."

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"You're getting old, Tony."

"Yeah, I know."

"Has he got the punch, Tony? You remember his arm was hurt."

"His arm ain't hurt for fightin'. He was pullin' on me but even his short ones hurt. I'm glad he did pull 'em some. Hell of a thing, ain't it, when a student's gotta pull 'em for a coach. He says he can reely hit—I'm willin' to believe he can."

"Old age is gettin' you, Tony."

"Say, Cap'n, I got a idea. You get Rice Ellison to let me have Deederick for our return bout with Aggies. He ain't got but a couple more basketball games before the tournament and they've won enough games to git in the tournament. If I could have Jeemie just one night I could win from the Aggies and we ain't beat 'em for five years. Rice could spare Deederick just this one game."

"Yeah, Rice could spare him, but Deederick won't fight. He says Min don't like fightin'. Min's his mother and she objects."

"You mean that big bozo is still obeyin' his mammy?"

"Sure, he does. Everything we want him to do, it's Min this and Min that. He thinks Min knows it all. The only way you could get him to fight would be to ask Min. What weight would you use him in, Tony—the seventy-five class? Rice wouldn't want you to sweat him down to sixty-five. You might weaken him and get him out of shape before the tournament."

"I'd use him as a heavy—use him in the unlimited. That's where I'm weak. I got the sixty-five and seventy-five sewed up."

"Tony, you can't put Deederick in there against Red Gentry. He weighs two hundred pounds. You think Rice is going to let his high-scorer fight the Conference heavyweight champion a week before the basketball tournament? Suppose Gentry mauled the life out of him. Tony, you can't do that. That's nonsense."

"Cap'n, you don't understand. Gentry ain't nothin' but a good college heavy."

"Well, what's Deederick?"

"Jeemie would be a classy youngster among pros. Gentry won't never hit him. I've worked with plenty of 'em like Gentry. I can still handle guys like that."

"You mean you're confident Deederick can whip Gentry?"

"I could still whip Gentry myself. He's just a big tough boy that's too much for these college heavies. Deederick wouldn't get his face dirty. He knows somethin'. He was started right."

"Tony, if I thought you were right, we might fix this thing up."

"Well, if he fights I'm gonna put up a month's salary on the fight."

"What's Deederick weighing?"

"About eighty."

"Can a classy hundred-and-eighty pounder whip a good college heavy that weighs around two hundred?"

"Any time."

"I'll see what I can do, Tony, but I don't believe he'll fight."

"We could get him to wire his mammy and ask her."

"Tony, he hurt a kid over at Q.M.A. one time and he sorta soured on fightin'."

"Well, tell him Frog Waller's gonna get murdered if he don't fight. Gentry beat the tar outa Frog over there. Frog's willin' but he's green. If I hadn't throwed in the towel, Gentry would of murdered Frog."

"Say, Tony, that's an idea."

MIN rang up a dime and signed for the telegram nervously. She was afraid of telegrams. She bit open the envelope and read:

MIN IF YOU WILL LET ME FIGHT IN A COLLEGE BOUT ONE WEEK FROM SATURDAY NIGHT I PROMISE NEVER TO PUT ON THE GLOVES AGAIN
DEEDY.

Min phoned Western Union a telegram telling Jim to go ahead. She looked at the calendar to see what the date would be. Then she called the station and asked what the fare was from Oakdell to the junction near S.E.U. She told the agent to reserve her accommodations for the twenty-first, one week from Saturday night.

Then she called Murtie to the cash register and went off to the kitchen to sit

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down. She wanted to think something out and the kitchen was the place Min thought everything out. She decided she wouldn't tell Jim she was coming, or anybody else but Gran. She wouldn't even tell Tim.

"The last time he'll ever have on the gloves." She had never seen Jim fight. Tears came in Min's eyes. The last time he'll ever fight—blast the savings account!

Jim had understood from Cap'n Eddie that there wasn't going to be anything said about his substituting for Frog in the heavyweight class. He was going to work out with Tony in the evenings when nobody was around and there wouldn't be any to-do about it. He'd save Frog getting the lights knocked out of him and it would be easy to outpoint a college fighter.

He was surprised, therefore, on the morning of the twentieth to see his picture in a football uniform featured in the newspapers, next to a picture of Red Gentry in trunks. Under the picture he read: "All-Southern quarterback challenges All-Southern heavyweight boxing champion." He read further: "Stellar football player turns fighter to settle a grudge. Red Gentry, great line backer for the Aggies, is the only man who ever knocked Jim Deederick out of a football game."

Jim couldn't believe that the S.E.U. publicity department had put this out. If he had known that sixty-five hundred people, rather than the usual fifteen hundred, would see the fight at a dollar fifty a head, he would have been foolish to believe anything else. Cap'n Eddie had known what would bring 'em out.

Rice Ellison was worried sick, but a basketball coach didn't rate enough to object. Slick Nelson wasn't worried; he had seen Jim work with Tony. Slick hoped Jim would give Red the works. Slick hated Gentry. It was dirty the way Gentry had knocked Jim out in last year's football game.

JIM sat in grim silence while Tony taped his hands. "Say, Tony," he said, "Send a manager upstairs to see if he can find Professor Tate."

A few minutes later Professor Tate came in, beaming with excitement. "Hello, Jim."

"Hello, Professor. Have you got Nub with you?"

Jim felt like he had raised little Nub Tate. He had often stayed with the boy while the Tates went out in the evenings. He got fifty cents an hour for doing it, and had a good light to study by after Nub went to bed. He had started this when Nub was three, and now Nub wouldn't let anybody else come.

"Of course Nub's up there—in a front seat. He wouldn't stay at home when he heard you were going to fight."

"I believe I'd get him home."

"Why, Jim?"

"Well, I think this party is goner be pretty rough. He's an awful little tad to be seeing this kind of thing."

Dr. Tate's face fell. He thought Jim meant he expected to be knocked out. "I see, I see. I'll get him home."

"That's up to you, Professor, but he's an awful little kid, and I'm afraid this is goner be a rough party before it's over. It may be pretty crude."

For two whole rounds the fight went fast. Gentry was trying for a knockout from the start. The silent crowd felt anxious for Jim Deederick. Gentry had barely missed at least twenty times. Only Tony Colletti and Jim were calm.

Tony saw that Jim kept coming back fast when Gentry missed and in the clinches he was catching Gentry with short jabs beneath the arms. Tony knew those short blows over the heart were going home and that it wouldn't be long until Gentry tired and Jim would throw his lightning right.

When he was ready for Jim to drop him, Tony would take his hand off his chin and scratch his head. Jim was already cutting his eyes toward Tony as the referee pushed the boys apart.

Twenty seconds before the bell at the end of the second round, Tony casually scratched his head. Jim feinted with his left and without further warning he shot his right to Gentry's head.

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The crowd heard the impact as far as the rear bleacher seats. Gentry's arms fell to his side; he toppled forward and staggered stiff-legged across the ring, his arms groping in grotesque gestures. He walked in half circles, reaching out like an old man in the dark. He reached for the ropes and wilted to the canvas.

Jim stood in his corner looking the other way as the referee counted to five. His big, hawklike face twitched nervously. He was wondering if he had fixed another youngster up for life when Gentry was saved by the bell.

When they sent Gentry out again for the third, Jim saw his eyes were glassy. Why doesn't the ref stop it? Jim wondered.

He jabbed him with his left and Gentry's guard fell and he stood shiny-eyed and helpless. Jim turned to the referee to ask, "Do I have to hit him again?" He was remembering the kid over at S.M.A. But Jim didn't finish the sentence. Like a wounded animal, half-conscious Red Gentry had lashed out with his right and hit Jim while his head was turned.

Jim was down. A shriek of indignation went up from the S.E.U. rooters, but Tony knew Red was out on his feet, that he didn't know where he was or whom he had hit. Tony didn't blame Red Gentry.

Jim was getting up. At the count of eight he was on his feet. Two dazed fighters staggered toward each other; both were out on their feet now. Jim was bleeding at the nose and Gentry was bleeding at the mouth.

"Stop it," the crowd yelled, "stop it!" Gentry swung at Jim again and missed. He fell forward; his head struck Jim's head and they both fell together.

In a moment they were both up again, standing face to face with their arms hanging helplessly. As a blurred half consciousness returned to Jim he made queer motions with his arms.

Through the shrieking and the din he could hear the sharp crack of Tony Colletti's voice. "Hit him, Jim—you're fighting, Jim—hit him—he's straight in front." Faintly Jim remembered he was fighting somebody somewhere and that he was right in front.

Jim hit whomever or whatever it was. It fell, and the shock of the blow brought Jim back to consciousness.

They were counting Red Gentry out.

AS THE crowd sifted out of the gymnasium, loiterers wondered who the good-looking woman was who met Deederick in the aisle and put her arms around his sweaty body and help him toward the room where the boxers dressed.

When Jim pulled his head from between the folds of a cold towel and blinked his eyes he realized he wasn't dreaming. "Hello, Min," he said.

"Hello, you big palooka," Min laughed, trying to squeeze his hands through the eight-ounce gloves.

"Was Gentry much hurt, coach?" Jim asked.

"I don't think so, Jim," Tony replied.

"That's what they always say."

"Anyway, Deedy, you won't ever have to ask that any more," Min said. "Are you okay now?"

"Sure, I'm okay, Min. My head's clearing. Say, what are you doing here?"

Min grinned proudly. "I came to see you fight—to see your last fight."

"Well, I'll be danged. Say, where'd you get the hat—where'd you get the suit—turn around—what have you done to your hair? Have you got a—a permanent?"

"Hush, Deedy, you'll have Mr. Colletti thinking I don't look this good all the time."

Tony was down on his knees untaping Jim's hands. "Talk about lookin' good You look plenty good, Mrs. Deederick, but this boy looks like candy to me. I had a hundred on him at two to one."

"So you won fifty, Mr. Colletti."

"No, two hundred."

"Two hundred? Who in the dickens was fool enough to bet odds against Deedy? I wish I'd a known there was that kind of money floatin' around. I won enough to pay for this trip bettin' even."

"What did you win, Min?"

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"I won a hundred dollars."

"Who'd you bet with?"

"Some bozo down at the Florolina Hotel that was shootin' off his mouth."

"Hadn't you ever seen him?"

"Lord, no."

"What did you do? Did you just walk up to some strange guy, Min?"

"Sure, why not? I'm used to men. I guess I'd have felt skittish if it had been a woman. I was settin' there in the hotel havin' myself a good dinner and I hear this bozo soundin' off at the table next to me about what Red Gentry is gonna do to Deederick.

"He offered to bet the guy with him a hundred, and I just patted my handbag and spoke up and says I'd like to have some of that, and he says what's your name, and I says that ain't none of your affair, my friend—my money'll spend just as good as yours, and he taken me up."

"Where's the money?"

"The clerk at the Florolina Hotel has it. Just like pickin' it up, wasn't it, Deedy? Say, Deedy, they must have taken in ten thousand dollars here tonight. Do you get any of it—you and Gentry?"

"No, the University gets it."

"How come? Is the University in the fight game?"

"No, Min, you don't understand."

"The devil I don't. I think you're the one that's short on the savvy. Don't you think so, Tony?"

Tony winked and looked very wise and Tony and Min laughed with a depth of understanding that irritated Jim.

"You go ahead, Jim," said Tony, "and get your shower. I'll take Min in Cap'n Eddie's office to meet the gang. They're all waiting for you in there."

A GOOD bath made Jim feel better. He put on his socks and shoes and underpants and went down to the visiting team locker room, looking for Red Gentry.

As he came in, the manager and coach were holding Red Gentry's shirt for him as though it were an overcoat.

"Hello, Red," Jim said.

Red turned his shoulders all the way around. His neck was too stiff to turn his head. "Hello, Jim," he said, forcing a grin as he extended his hand.

The two boys looked at each other with a friendliness born of deep respect.

"I hear the party was a little rough," Red said.

"That's what I hear," Jim replied. "How you feelin' now?"

"Oh, I feel sorta like a steam shovel had fell on me. But I'm okay."

"Say, Red, I wanted to tell you I never had nothin' to do with that grudge fight stuff."

"Forget it, Jim. I know that. I knew it all the time. Whoever done it knew how to get the crowd. I was thinkin' when I was waitin' for our fight to start that half that crowd never seen a college. Rough lookin' bunch to have in a college gym, wasn't it?"

"I noticed that myself, Red. I was thinkin' as I come through the crowd I'd be lucky if I didn't get spit on. They was chewin' and spittin' without even lookin'. It reminded me of home. You're lucky to get by a whole day at a carnival or the county fair down home if you don't get spit on a couple of times."

"On purpose, Jim?"

"No. The folks just spit careless when they're havin' a good time."

"Say, Jim, they tell me I hit you when you wasn't lookin'. I swear I was out."

"I know that, Red. Forget it."

"Okay, boy. I appreciate you not lettin' me have it when I was out."

"Okay, Red."

"You gonna fight in the tournament, Jim?"

"Naw. I'm through. This was my last one."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"Well, so long, Red. Drop over to the beanery and see me sometime when you're up here. I'm over there most of the time."

"Okay, Jim, I'd like to do that."

"So long, Red."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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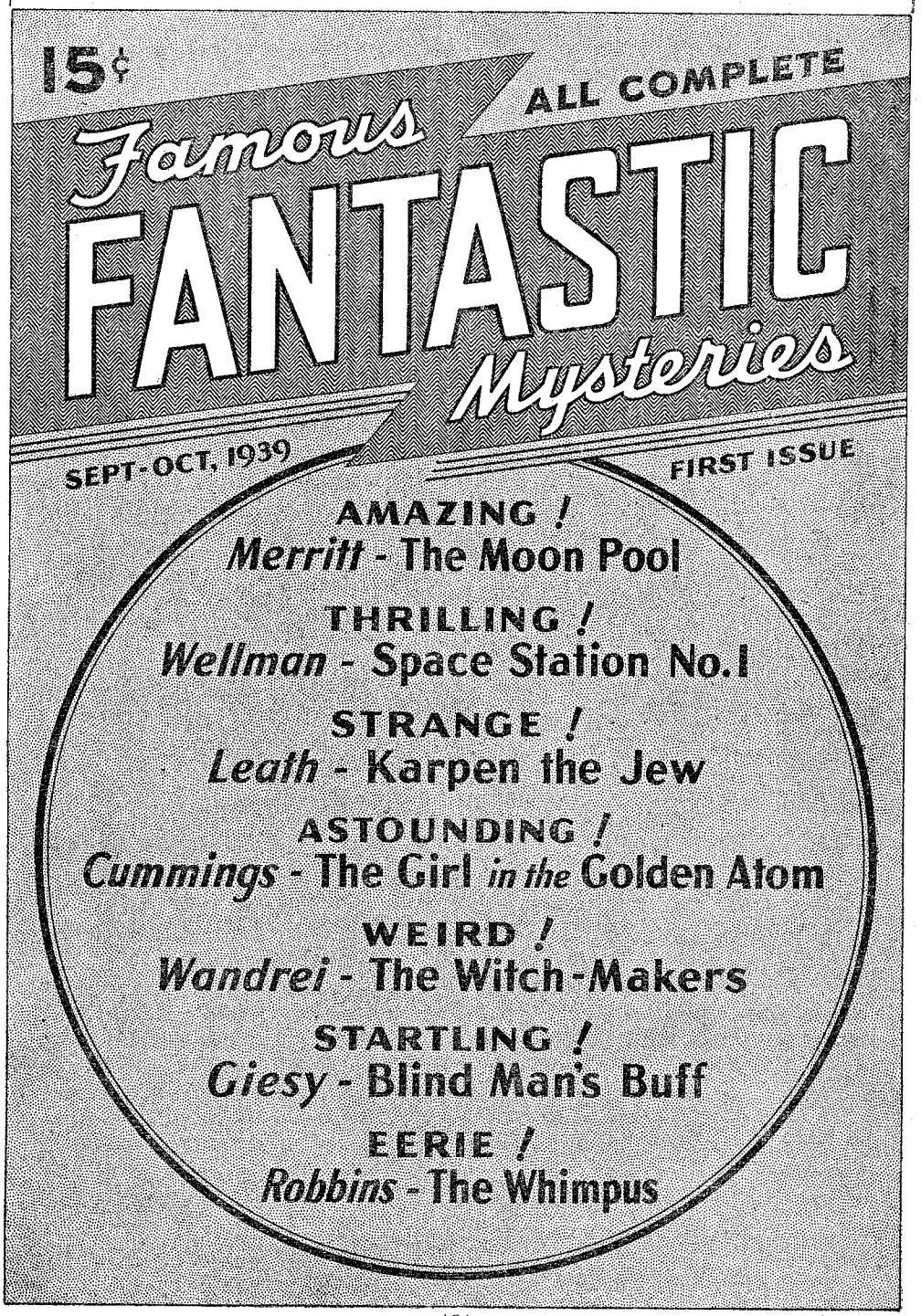

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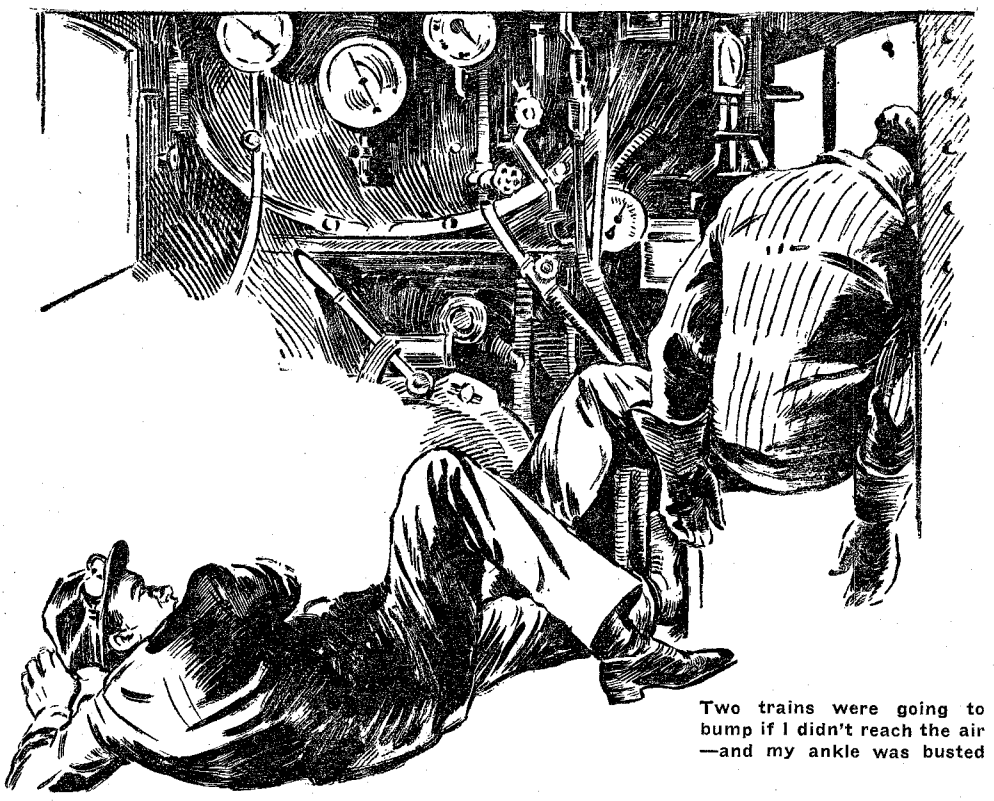

Two trains were going to bump if I didn't reach the air —and my ankle was busted

Hear Them Whistles Blowing!

The ghost of Casey Jones makes a hero out of one railroader, when lives hang by a shoelace

By RICHARD SALE

Author of "Fish Ain't Got No Brains", "I Want to Be Like Lefty", etc.

IT WAS back in the days before a hog had a dead man's control. There wasn't no control except the man at the throttle. He gave her the steam and he gave her the air, and if he upped and walked away from his seat at the window, there was no dead man's control to stop that red ball.

I was firing for Wallaby Joe Wheeler in those days on the Denver-Frisco run. We rolled the drivers of Number 460 which was a six-coupled Consolidation of the first water. She was the lady with the sixty-one inch drivers and Walschert gear and on the high iron, she'd pull her heart out, and she didn't need no double-heading when we crossed the Reno hump.

Wallaby Joe, he was a fine engine man. He could break her out without a jerk. Back in the gondolas, even to the swaying crummy, they wouldn't feel a breath. Wallaby would give her the throttle, opening up on the quadrant with the kind of ease which made 460 take a long breath and start rolling. They didn't need draft gear in the couplings of the freight cars we hauled. He pushed her off so nice and quiet, they could have used the old pin and never hurt a train.

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But Wallaby was getting on, and his eyes had started to go first, so that he wore glasses all the time now. And after that, my wife said to me that his wife had said to her that Wallaby had had himself a fine stroke one night, and they thought he was dead sure.

"Wallaby," I said one day when we were highballing west of Denver, "you oughta quit. While you still got health, you oughta quit. You get a stroke in that engine and there'll be a pretty mess."

"Look, Al," he said, "it ain't like I was running a line of varnish west. I swing the freight drag and there ain't nobody to kill in a freight drag except the bums on the rods under the reefers, and the conductor in the crummy. I wouldn't feel bad at all about killing any of them."

"Sure," I said, "I can see your point fine. But you got to remember that we always take the siding near Montville on the Reno slide down. There's a string of varnish coming up. It would make a nice thing if we bumped that engine. That's a passenger train. Boy, I'd hate to see her staring us in the face. That's Number 9870, the big mountain job. These two engines would sure make a nice bump."

"Al," said Wallaby, "if anything happened to me, you could always step in here and give her the air. You could give her the air hard. I wouldn't even be mad at you if you slapped a flat on the drivers. Just so's you stopped her. Long as you're here, I'm all right."

"I don't like it," I said. "It was hereabout that old Casey Jones came roaring down the mountain them years ago. Boy, I wouldn't want no repeat on the cornfield meet he put on."

"There ain't never gonna be a repeat like that," Wallaby said solemnly. "I'm surprised at you, Al, thinking such a thing. You don't think a hogger like Casey Jones'd stand in the ashes and just watch a bump, do you? Why, hell on a coupler pin, Al, he wouldn't 'low a thing like that."

"Casey Jones is a dead engine man," I said. "He ain't allowing anything. He's dead and gone."

WALLABY shook his head. "Maybe he ain't dropping sand, and pushing pistons or giving her air, but he's a live corpse, Al. He's kind o' fond of this stretch o' iron. He's still around."

"You mean, a ghost?"

"Don't know about ghosts. Don't believe in ghosts. But all I know is what Peke Swanson told me about the night of the flood when he was rolling number 496 across the Rienze Divide with a load o' mail and milk stringing out behind him.

"Peke Swanson said it was raining so hard he couldn't even see his own compound air cylinder out ahead o' him. His domes and his stacks was lost in the fog, and the rain wouldn't let him see his own headlight. He was late and he was turning them over hard. Peke, he knew every inch o' the iron across that divide to Carson City. He couldn't see, but he knew his iron, so he pushed her."

I said, "I never heard tell of Peke Swanson wrecking the mail."

"He didn't wreck her. Here he was coming, down Rieze to the Wallace Trestle. You know where it is there. How you come down the mountain and highball that curve, and then, *bam,* you're rattling on the railbreaks across that trestle and ninety feet o' space under your trucks. Peke, he started down, and he wasn't gonna let up on her for the curve either, she being banked sweetly.

"And all of a sudden, here's this guy in the cab. And he says, 'Hello, Peke,' he says, 'Remember me?' Peke knew him you see, in the old days.

" 'Casey Jones!' Peke says. 'In the name of God.'

" 'That's right,' Casey says, 'and you listen here to me, Peke Swanson. You'd better slap the air on this job or you're gonna wind up in the valley. Wallace Trestle washed outa there twenty minutes ago and you're highballing for hell.'

"And Peke, he slapped the air on and pulled her up at the foot o' the curve, and lord, sure enough, the trestle was gone, and so was Casey Jones."

"Gwan," I said.

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"Man and boy, that's a true story," Wallaby said. "Ask Pete Swanson; he'll tell you the whole thing."

"Gwan," I said. "I don't believe it. Peke, he's got an imagination, and he just made that up. He had a hunch the trestle was gone and he stopped her, and he made that Casey Jones stuff up."

"That's sacrilege, Al, that's just what you're saying."

"I don't believe it," I said. "Just hokum."

"That blasphemy," said Wallaby. "Just plain blasphemy."

. . . So this night, we got the green eye at the Bakerfield siding and we went up the mountain, hauling a string of empties. Number 460 was running sweet. She didn't have a squeak in any of her joints, and under her drivers the clicks came up through the spokes right into our heels. The cinders curled back over our heads, and we could feel the rhythm of the counterbalances, swinging round and round down there above the railhead. Man, she was a sweet engine, that 460, sweet and sure and fast for a freight hog.

"Glistenin' pistons!" Wallaby said in a low voice. "Ain't she a dandy now? She couldn't run no better if Casey Jones was the man at the throttle."

"She couldn't run no sweeter," said I, if'n the good Lord himself was wheeling her tonight."

"Fire her," Wallaby muttered. "Fire her, Al, give me lots o' steam tonight 'cause we're highballing west."

SEEMED like no time at all before we reached the divide and started across. Me, I was pulling coal outa the shaking tender, filling that shovel's belly full, when all of a sudden we came to the Rieze Tower SW and I glanced out over the coal as we plummeted by, and I saw the red board staring us in the face.

The red board and the red eye: that meant stop and take the siding, but we didn't stop and we didn't take the siding. Old 460 ripped by, gaining speed all the time as we cleared the hump and started down the mountains for Reno, the wind whistling like a banshee and the cab rocking back and forth hard as a cradle.

Boy, she was wheeling. She was wheeling so danged fast I knew that cradle might turn into an iron hearse before we got through. I clung to the braces on the end sill of the tender as we hit the curve by the Wallace Trestle. The wheel flanges ground against the rail head and screamed out in pain.

We made it, and I was getting another breath; and when I got it, I shouted, "Wallaby! Wallaby, you gone crazy? Give her the air and pull in her pistons! That was a red board we passed at SW! My golly, look down there—look down the mountain, you can see the mountain hog coming up with her varnish and her passengers! This is a single track, Wallaby, and if'n you don't slap the air on her drivers, there's gonna be a bump!"

Wallaby didn't answer me.

He sat by the window, with his head half out, and he was limp and slumped. I could see he was out; something was wrong. His hand wasn't on the throttle and it wasn't on the brake either. His hands were hanging down at his sides and he was out cold. And I thought, "Al," I thought, "you got to stop this engine, you got to put flats on her tires and sparks on the rails, you got to break out coupler pins and maybe mash a box car or two, but you got to stop her."

And then, when the cab seemed to stop swaying a second, I made a jump across the plate between the frame of the engine and the tender drawbar and I hit the floor and skidded and slammed up against the injector pipes and my foot went in between them hard and hurt like blazes, and I knew I'd busted my ankle.

There I was, caught there. I mighta pulled my foot out from between them pipes, but it was busted and the pain all but blanked me when I tried. I was bushwhacked. I looked up at Wallaby Joe, and he was dead. There was us, Wallaby Joe dead at the controls, and me, Full-head Al, all stuck and busted just outa reach.

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When we hit the snake curve, I could peer out past the cab's end frame and down below us on the grade. I could see the lights of Number 9870 and her long haul of Pullmans all wheeling up the hill as only that big old mountain girl can churn 'em. I could see her, and me lying there with a dead man and helpless as a hobo in a runaway hopper.

I tried to reach for the throttle to close her, but the quadrant was too far away. I tried to reach for the brake handle to swing her shut, but it was two feet from the end o' my hand and I couldn't make it. Only thing I could reach was the whistle cord, and I yanked and I yanked, giving out blasts all the way as we rattled and swayed along. You should have heard that whistle blowing! I cussed and strained and reached and cried.

And I knew that there was two locomotives that was gonna bump.

ALL of a sudden, I looked up and there was a guy. I thought it was the brakeman come all the way up from the crummy when he heard the whistle blasting. But he wasn't the brakeman. He looked like a boomer, but he weren't no boomer either. He was an engine man; he was dressed like an engine man, his big gloves dirty and greasy. And he looked all torn up as if he'd been in an awful bang. His engine suit was ripped and his face was all crooked.

He said, "Stop straining, Full-head Al. You just stop straining. You're not gettin' nowhere like that."

"Don't stand there talking to me like a no-account wiper!" I yelled. "Give her the air! Pull the air on her!"

"Al," he said, "I can't do that. I'd sure like to do it, but it ain't my engine."

"You damn old fool," I said, "we're gonna bump if you don't stop her right away! There's two trains on one track and two trains ain't ever passed each other on one track yet without a bump!"

"Full-head Al," he said sadly, "I'd shore like to stop this belchin' hog, but it ain't in my power to do the act. It's hard enough for an engine man in my condition to get here a-tall without pulling no throttle close and slappin' air into her brakes. That's a lot to ask of a ghost, Al, and a mighty sad ghost too."

"You!" I said. "I seen you before somewhere—I seen your picture—"

"Shore," he said. "I usta handle a freight haul in these parts some time back. You remember me, Full-head Al. The man at the throttle."

"Casey Jones!" I whispered.

"You got to stop this enjine yourself," said Casey, shaking his head. "Al, I'd be glad to do the act, but I can't. I'm only a poor ghost."

"I'm stuck here," I screamed. "And my foot is busted!"

"Al," said he, "if you could get your shoe offa your foot, you could pull clear. It's the shoe that's jammed."

"This ain't no oxford!" I bellowed. "This is a full shoe laced all the way up. I can't slide out of it!"

"Mebbe I can help you there," Casey Jones said slowly. "Maybe I got just enough ectoplasm to pull the snap bow on that lace, and then you can pull your foot out."

He went over to the injector pipe and bent down and worked on that bow where I'd tied the lace. It felt like cold air hitting my leg, and all of a sudden, he said, "Pull!" and I pulled and I could feel the lace go and my foot was outa that shoe and all but killing me.

"All right," Casey said sadly. "She's all yours. Kill her!" He spat into the firebox. "Kill her quick, Al, because 9870 is stopped below you on account of your whistle blasts and you're headin' for her fast."

"I'll kill her," I panted as I crawled across the cab floor dragging that bum pin behind me, and gasping at the hurt all the way. "I'll burn her drivers down to the hub! I'll shake her valve gear off the yoke! I'll split her side rods clean in two! I'll put flats on every tire, and I'll melt them pistons hot, and shake the crossheads outa their guides!"

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Then I reached the throttle and closed her down, and the breath went out of 460's stack and she started coasting. And then I got in behind Wallaby Joe and got to my knees and I gave her the air. I didn't fool. I gave her the air right. I locked her drivers and she went skidding on the rail-heads, and I gave her sand, and she screeched and screamed and groaned and yelled and hissed and spit and swayed.

And stopped.

And when she stopped, the light of Number 9870 was staring her right in the smokebox front and their pilots, coupler to coupler, wasn't more than three hundred yards apart.

I turned around to thank Casey Jones, and he was just dropping off the side. He waved his hand once, and he said, "That's all right, Full-head. See you sometime around the Salt Lake run," and he was gone in the night.

No, I never saw him since. But, if I ever get in another jam, Casey will be there. No doubt about it, at all.

I MUSTA passed out because when I opened my eyes again, the cab was full o' guys. There was the conductor from the string o' varnish, and the hogger of 9870, and my brakeman who'd come across the roofwalks of the empties between 460 and her caboose. They kept patting my back and telling me what a hero I was, and how I was gonna be retired or given my own engine, or get a pension and what not.

"Now listen," I said, slow on account of my foot hurt like fire, "I ain't no hero. I couldn't've done anything by myself. I was stuck, my foot was stuck by the injector pipes and I couldn't've reached my laces to untie it, and we'd have bumped if he hadn't untied that lace."

"Who?" they said. "Who untied the lace?"

"Casey Jones," I said. "Casey Jones himself, by the Lord!"

"Oh, don't be modest, Full-head," said the bull from my own train. "You saved all our lives, you don't have to be modest about it."

"I'm telling you," I said. "My shoe lace was on the other side of the injector pipe. I never could've reached it. If Casey Jones hadn't swung aboard—he had just enough ectoplasm, he said—"

"Delirious," said the 9870 engine man. "That busted pin o' his. Lotta pain. His imagination—makes him delirious—"

Well, nobody can blame me for getting a little mad. Here I was, giving the man facts about what I'd seen, and—

"Damn it!" I said. "He was *here!* Go try to untie your own shoe lace when your foot is jammed between them pipes! Try reaching around behind the injector pipe! It can't be done!"

They all looked kind of serious, and then they went over to the injector pipe where my shoe was still stuck and they took a look and then they came back, looking sober and they shook their heads. "Well," said the conductor, "you're right. You couldn't have untied that lace. Boy, it would have been just too bad if it hadn't busted."

"Busted?" I said.

"Sure. You can see it plain as day. You must have pulled so hard, you busted your own shoe lace, the shoe loosened and you got your foot out. The lace is busted. The bow is still tied, but the lace busted lower down and loosened the whole shoe. That's how you got your foot out."

"I'm telling you," I cried, "he was here, Casey was!"

"I don't believe it," said the conductor.

"That's sacrilege," I said.

"Just hokum," said the mountain engine man. "You did it, and you know it, and Casey Jones is one dead-and-gone high-baller."

"Blasphemy," I said. "Just out-and-out blasphemy."

They picked me up and grinned at each other like they knew what it was all about —even if they didn't.

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THE sound of heavy guns and steel on steel has grown loud this week. With a couple of inter-reader skirmishes going splendidly, we don't know when there has been so much turbulence in this department. It happens, too, that one participant in the hostilities raises a point worth talking over. Why, this correspondent asks, do we allow our authors to be "insulted" in these columns?

Well, of course "insulted" is a pretty strong word for it; "manhandled" might be a politer and more accurate term. We permit the readers of our stories to throw heavy objects at the men who write them for two reasons. First of all, this is the readers' magazine and they have a right to kick, just so long as they speak in a printable fashion and don't attempt to invade this office with a horsewhip.

In the second place, once in a while (though seldom) one of these brickbats strikes an author where he needs to be struck. It is possible for an author to learn something from rough treatment—once he has gone through various stages of rage, humiliation and despondency and emerged a sane, if shaken, man. Now this doesn't happen often; most of the critical remarks in the letters we get are no more than personal opinion. But anyhow there is nothing like an insult to pick up an author after a hard day's work.

It's time we turned you over to the person who started all this—

MRS. JOHN MITCHELL

I am writing you in defense of one of your most brilliant authors, none other than Theodore Roscoe.

In your June 3rd issue of ARGOSY, in the Readers' Viewpoint, you have a letter from a Don Wilkins. You will pardon my expression, but who in the Sam Hill does Mr. Wilkins think he is? He writes as if the improvements or changes in the ARGOSY were all made to please his ego.

Mr. Wilkins writes a fairly intelligent letter, but in giving his opinion of Roscoe he is positively insulting.

I believe everyone has a right to dislike the style of the various authors, but it is not necessary to resort to such un-intelligent adjectives as "louzee", "dud", etc.

At least you, the Editor, had the politeness to refer to Mr. Wilkins as a gentleman. However, seeing that he refers to himself as, "an old, old reader," I take it for granted that he's just a crabby old man, overflowing with his own importance.

As for you, Mr. Editor, I can't understand why you would print a letter that is insulting to your authors. After all, they have a great deal to do with the fame of your magazine, and I should think you would spare them such a letter. I know that they have to put up with a certain amount of criticism, but I don't believe any author of your magazine rates that type of criticism. Again, to quote Mr. Wilkins, at the conclusion of his lengthy letter, "On the whole the new ARGOSY yarns hit me right where I live." Well, sir, I hope this letter hits you right were you live.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.

THAT'S only the first bout on tonight's card, ladies and gentlemen. The second has been fought in weekly installments and promises very soon to assume epic proportions. Re-introducing

E. R. G.

In May 13 ARGOSY Mr. J. H. Mason rears up on his hind legs and growls about my previous comments on "Ship of Ishtar." Mr. Mason was very cleverly sarcastic, not to say voluble,

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and proceeded to give lie to all my statements regarding the "Ship."

All right, J. H. So you liked "Ship of Ishtar." So did a majority of ARGOSY readers, as was proven by the ARGOSY vote. And maybe it was a great story. But it distinctly didn't appeal to me —and I stated my remark in exactly that way.

What was it the Editor said to a rap against the Hornblower series (There was a group of yarns that were tops!)? "If everyone liked Hornblower, he wouldn't be the lovable human character the author intended him to be."

Falsely dramatic I called Merritt's tale, and falsely dramatic I still call it, "unprecedented transitions" and "ultimate conflicts" notwithstanding. The story was a pumped-up thing—deny it if you will, Mr. Mason—and many, many passages were a very distinct purple.

Fairy tale still goes, too, happy ending or not. Walt Disney was proud to call his "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" a fairy tale, and it was childishly delightful where the birds attacked the witch in Snow White's defense. But you would have me concede that it is grown-up drama when the "doves of Ishtar" made such an inspired defense of the ship. Nuts.

Perhaps this letter will bring down a horde of other J. H. Masons flocking to Merritt's defense. Nevertheless, let me say, if you like Merritt, take him. I don't like him and don't want him.

Repeating my former statements, I still think Joel Rogers is the greatest writer of our time. "Steamboat Gold" was a great story, and so is "Lost Harbors." "Minions of the Moon," Mr. Mason, I recommend as a *real* fantastic—the best since "Seven Worlds to Conquer." A tongue-in-the-cheek farce, lightly told, yet it was solidly founded. Bennett Foster's "Rifle Rock" was a different sort of Western, and "I'll Wed by Moonlight" an excellent short.

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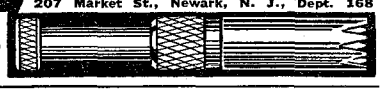

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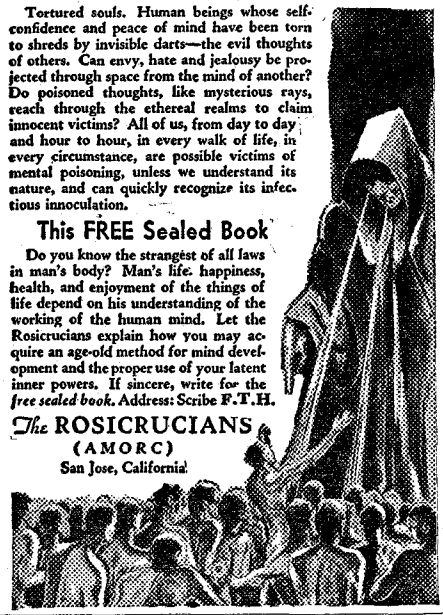

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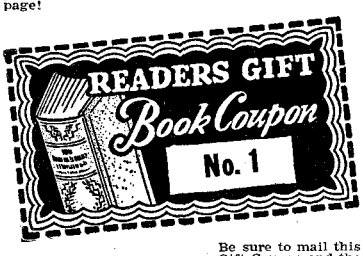

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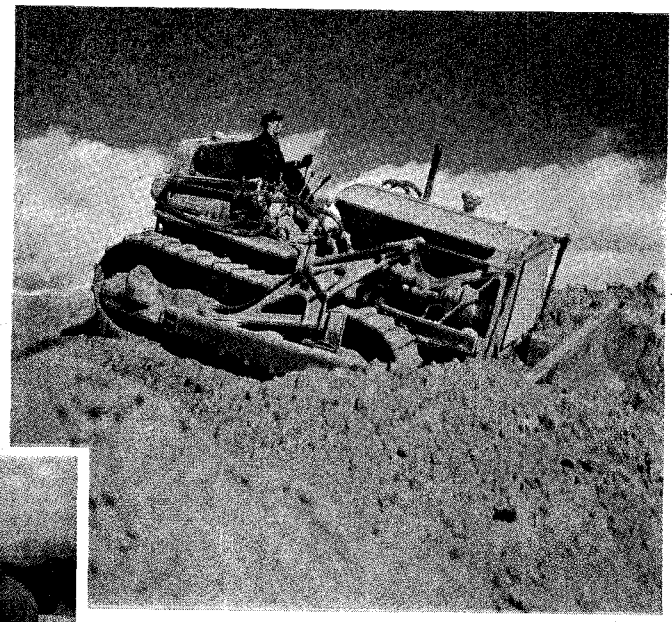

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